

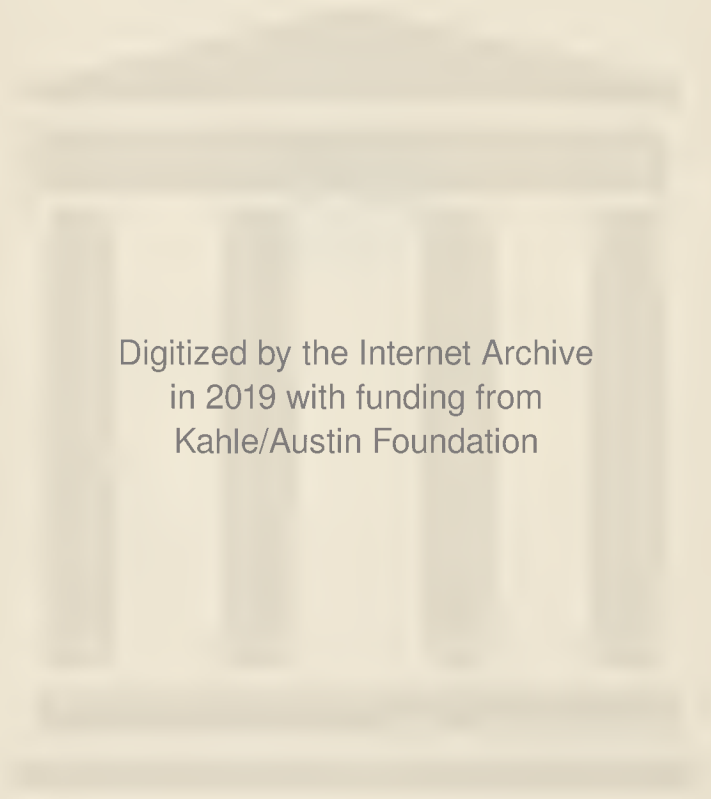


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# LECTURES

ON THE

# BRITISH POETS.

BY

HENRY REED,

AUTHOR OF "INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH LITERATURE," AND "LECTURES ON ENGLISH  
HISTORY AND TRAGIC POETRY, AS ILLUSTRATED BY SHAKESPEARE."

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## PREFACE.

THE great success of the two volumes of my brother's Lectures—the first on “English Literature,” and the second on “History as illustrated by Shakspeare's Plays,”—has induced me to publish another series, still more complete, on the “British Poets,” which was delivered by Mr. Reed in 1841. These lectures are printed from the author's manuscript, with no other alteration than the omission of passages which he had used in his second course.

An addition has been made to these volumes of two essays on kindred subjects,—one on “English Sonnets,” and another on “Hartley Coleridge.”

The present volumes are probably the last of my brother's works which I shall publish. The lectures already issued have been most kindly received on both sides of the Atlantic ; and it would be ungraceful were I to omit, for myself and his still nearer family, an expression of the deep feeling with which this appreciation has inspired us.

W. B. R.

PHILADELPHIA, February 13, 1857.

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# LECTURES

ON

## ENGLISH POETRY.

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### LECTURE I.

OBJECT OF THE COURSE—POETRY THE EMINENCE OF LITERATURE—THE HISTORY OF LITERATURE ILLUSTRATED BY GENERAL HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY—THE LIVES OF SPENSER AND MILTON—A CATHOLIC TASTE IN POETRY—VARIETY OF POETRY—INTOLERANCE OF LITERARY JUDGMENT—RYMER AND VOLTAIRE ON SHAKSPEARE—JOHNSON ON MILTON—JEFFREY ON WORDSWORTH—QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ENLIGHTENED CRITIC—UTILITARIAN CRITICISM—THE TRUE USE OF POETRY—ITS DEPRECIATION AND ABUSE—ALBUMS AND SCRAP-BOOKS—BEN JONSON'S PANEGYRIC ON HIS ART—WORDSWORTH—OBJECT OF THESE LECTURES NOT TO ENCOURAGE POETICAL COMPOSITION—SYDNEY'S DEFENCE—CONNECTION OF POETRY AND SCIENCE—THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES—MATERIALISM AND INFIDELITY—INFLUENCE ON IMAGINATIVE POWER—VINDICATION OF POETRY.

THE course of Lectures I am about attempting is the first of a contemplated series upon English Poetry, undertaken as well from an uncalculating impulse, as from a conviction that, in our systems of education, it is a department more than any neglected. The treasures of the English tongue are sacrificed to the attainment of those which are more recondite in the dead or foreign languages. As, year after year, I have wandered through the forsaken region (if I may be indulged in so far speaking of myself) and contemplated the mighty achievements of our English mind, a glowing admiration has kindled, higher and higher, the hope that it might not be beyond my strength to be the humble guide of others to the same unfailing springs of intellectual happiness.

The portion of literature to be treated of is that which may be regarded as its eminence,—its Poetry. I have ventured to speak of it as the noblest portion of our noble literature; and, if I shall succeed in awakening a thoughtful admiration of that which has been given to the world by the souls of mighty poets finding utterance in the music of English words, that opinion will not be condemned for its extravagance. It is a large field to travel over; and, therefore, among the introduc-

tory topics at present to be noticed, it is necessary to advert to the general plan, which will, however, more satisfactorily appear when practically illustrated in the succeeding lectures. It will be my aim to convey such information on the history of English poetry as the circumstances under which we meet will allow. To penetrate the obscurity of an early age, and thence to trace the progress of poetry from its rude beginnings down to modern years,—to show it in its successive eras,—to discover the connection between the poetry and the spirit of the age acting and reacting on each other,—to see how at one time the muse has soared and at another crept,—are topics which the idea of these lectures comprehends, how far soever the execution may fall short of it. And here let me beg your reflection on the remark that there are few higher functions of criticism than to reveal the connection between illustrious literary production and the contemporaneous state of opinion and feeling, and to show especially the poet's inspirations in their relation to dominant thoughts and passions. For it is not to be questioned that, in God's providence over the destinies of the human race, men are called into being with powers to cheer or rebuke the spirit of their times with voices prophetic of weal or woe. This consideration with regard to literary history will, therefore, involve, to a certain extent, allusion to what is usually and eminently entitled history; I mean the narrative of national events. Further than this, comprehensive criticism embraces considerations of a biographical character; for, in studying the works of genius, it is a matter of no slight interest to examine the gradual structure, or rather growth, of the individual powers that have produced them. I should, for instance, deem that but an imperfect comment on the Faery Queen which took no heed of the age in which its author lived,—a time animated by a high, adventurous spirit, when the sentiment of chivalry was still for a season outliving its institutions and usages, and which the poet sought imaginatively to perpetuate in his matchless allegory. It would also be a faulty negligence to turn away from the personal history which portrays Spenser embodying his high imaginings while dwelling in a barbarous island, and, at length, heart-stricken with neglect and domestic sorrow. It comes within the range of an enlarged criticism to tell of the young instincts and presages of Milton's genius, such as break forth in the exquisite inspiration of *Comus*, and thence to trace his sombre-coloured life till, after having consorted with the stern Republicans, defending their sternest deed, and eulogizing their mightiest chieftain, he retired, in danger and the darkness of a hopeless blindness, to build up the immortal epic of the *Paradise Lost*.

But a course of literary lectures must comprehend more than the communication of historical and biographical facts, the details of which, orally addressed, are apt to be unsatisfactory and often wearisome. The mind may be oppressed by the accumulation of isolated facts, which are never more troublesome than when unprovided with some principle by means of which they may be marshalled into order. A paramount object, therefore, which I have proposed, is the cultivation of a theory of criticism to be familiarized by application to the most worthy effusions of the English muse, from the first great outbreak in the happy freshness of Chaucer and the early nameless minstrels, down to the majestic and meditative imagination of Wordsworth. When I speak of a theory of criticism, let me not be understood as having in my thoughts any hypothesis fashioned from the study of some particular form of poetic invention and narrowed to it, but an ample groundwork built in the philosophy of the human spirit, and fitted, therefore, to sustain a *catholic* taste in the estimate of literary productions. The mind is too apt to become capricious and contracted, bigoted in its literary creed, and cramped and enfeebled by a species of favouritism; so that nothing has been more common than attempts to strip the laurel from the brow of a poet like Pope, or to refuse it to that great living master of the art who has passed, through the obloquy of a scornful ignorance, to his fame. In all this there is grievous error. And, let me say, this narrowness of taste and judgment must carry with it its own penalty; for greatly does it diminish the occasions of literary enjoyment. The intellect, like the heart, has its hundred avenues of happiness, and it is not wise to close or abandon any of them. The true aim of every student should be to acquire a taste, which, while it can discriminate between the different endowments of different minds, can also feed on all that genius sets before it, no matter how various it may be. A squeamish and fastidious taste in reading is a disease which grows more and more inveterate with indulgence, and, like a hypochondriac's appetite, makes its victim alike more helpless and more unhealthy. A taste strong in health is not more ready to reject what is unwholesome than to draw its nourishment from variety. The food of the mind, like that of the body, is various, and the function of health is to assimilate to itself the variety which nature proffers. It is the invalid whose delicate digestion needs to be pampered with dainties. So is it with the weak and uncultivated in intellect. Genius pours out its abundance for them in vain. In this way arises exclusive devotion to some one author, as if wisdom had been his monopoly. While the oracle of poetry is uttering its inspirations in a thousand tones, there are ears which are deaf to all but one of the

notes which issue from the temple. Genius has its multitude of voices, like nature with its scale of sounds, from the thunder rolling along the heavens and echoed by Alps or Andes, down to the whisper (to borrow one of Shakspeare's sweet sentences)—

“As gentle  
As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,  
Not wagging his sweet head.”—*Cymbeline*.

Of this dulness consequent on contracted taste it would not be difficult to find instances to verify the observation. But it is more than individual malady, for it spreads into an epidemic; and I shall hereafter have occasion to advert to revolutions in literary opinion, and to show that the feeblest voice had gained the public ear which was almost closed to that of Milton, when he craved “fit audience, though few,” while Cowley was earning his speedy popularity; and, again, the glory of the older poets fading before the admiration of the high-wrought verse of Pope. An illustration within our own memory was that declamatory, undisciplined, indiscriminate enthusiasm, which, knowing no other inspiration, was in truth the poorest tribute that could be paid to genius such as Lord Byron unquestionably possessed. The domain of Parnassus is not so narrow as to be susceptible of any such appropriation. The sovereignty of even Homer or Shakspeare could hold no exclusive usurpation. The sacred mount is covered with the homesteads of the poets; some, in modest humility, where its first declivity rises from the level of the plain; others, midway up the mount; and a few seated, where others durst not soar, high as the summit in the upper air. The great endowment of poetry has been bestowed in almost infinite degrees and forms; and it is the office of philosophic criticism to trace it in its truth wherever it may exist:—in the homely ballad chanted in the nursery; in the traditionary songs of a peasantry; in strains that have kindled the spirit of a people in the hour of battle; in the softer melody of love; in the mournful elegy; in the bitterness of satire; in devotional hymns, the measured utterance of thanksgiving, prayer, and praise; in the lofty aspirations of the meditative ode; in the lifelike creation of the drama, “gorgeous tragedy in sceptred pall;” and in the elaborate structures of the rarely-attempted epic. The taste thus cultivated and strengthened will be safe from that narrow-spirited habit which prostrates the intellect in its solitary idolatry. The voice of the muse, come whence it may, if it come in truth, will not come in vain; for the open heart will give it entrance. So important do I consider the possession of a catholic spirit in literature as the means of enlarged intel-



lectual enjoyment, that I shall sedulously shun the adoption of any contracted poetical system, directing my efforts rather, in the examination of English poetry, so to discuss the subject as to assist not only in discriminating, but in appreciating, the varieties of merit.

The catalogue of English poets is voluminous. The mere enumeration of them and of their writings—if it were in my power to give—would consume the time which will be at my command. In a course, therefore, of lectures limited in number as well as length, some method must be adopted in treating a subject which, of course, transcends the necessary bounds. The annals of English poetry offer a series of names known much more familiarly than their productions, because fame has given them an elevation in the midst of what Milton styles “the laureate fraternity of poets.” To such names the student of literature first turns his thoughts, seeking to justify their fame. I propose, therefore, in travelling through this wide and populous region of literature, to select for especial examination the most illustrious poets who in regular succession have enriched the language from the period of its formation down to the present time. Besides, criticism on the productions of the masters in an art possesses greater interest and value than on those which bear a fainter impression of the stamp of genius. It is in the school of mighty artists that criticism itself is taught. The critic acquires skill by the modest contemplation—the affectionate study—of the works of genius. The great English poets, arrayed as they may be in an almost unbroken chronological series, stand as the types and emblems of the literary spirit of their times; and thus the progress of literature may be illustrated by the examination of those who are most prominent in its successive eras. This method will therefore be pursued, with occasional notices of others less celebrated.

This method will, I trust, unless grievously deficient in the execution, conduce to the attainment of the best purposes of criticism, on which I desire to say a few words before passing to other introductory topics. The main design of poetry being to communicate, through the medium of the imagination, pleasures of a highly intellectual and moral nature, the criticism which best subserves the cause is that which illustrates and develops qualities in poetical composition adapted to effect such results. Fault-finding—so far from constituting, as is sometimes supposed, criticism—is but a subordinate function, necessary, indeed, occasionally to the formation of a discriminating judgment. But, whenever the detection of poetical irregularities and error is made the *chief* purpose, we suffer ourselves to be cheated of the enjoyment which attends that better habit of seeking for what gives pleasure in

preference to that which gives pain. The best criticism ever produced has been that which had its birth in a genial admiration—a love—of that on which it passes judgment. The worst criticism is that which is engendered in apathy, spleen, or malice. There is no more healthy mental exercise than the study of a great work of art, if directed to the discovery of the elements of its glory, to cause its sublimity or its beauty to be felt more and more deeply, and not only felt, but understood, that the understanding may have cognizance of that which the heart has loved. It is to criticism thus conducted in the spirit of faith and hope that genius vouchsafes to make the most ample revelation of its glories.

It is important, too, to shun the habit of dogmatic criticism. It is a singular but familiar fact, that men are never more apt to be intolerant of difference of opinion than in what concerns the mingled powers of judgment and feeling denominated taste. I need suggest no other illustration than the striking contrariety of judgment on the merits of the most distinguished poets who have flourished in our own times, the discussion of which I shall not now anticipate by the expression of any opinion. To what is this owing? Partly, no doubt, to variety of character, intellectual and moral; to diversity of temperament and education; and whatsoever else makes one man in some respects a different being from his neighbour. Each reader, as well as each writer, has his peculiar bent of mind, his own way of thinking and feeling; so that the passionate strains of poetry will find an adaptation in the heart of one, while its thoughtful, meditative inspirations will come home to the heart of another. This consideration must not be lost sight of, because it goes far toward allaying this literary intolerance, which, like political or theological intolerance, is doubly disastrous, for it at the same time narrows a man's sympathies and heightens his pride. But the variety of mind or of general disposition will not wholly explain the variety of literary opinions. After making all due allowance in this respect, it is not to be questioned that there is right judgment and wrong judgment,—a sound taste and a sickly taste. There are opinions which we may hold with a most entire conviction of their truth, an absolute and imperious self-confidence, and a judicial assurance that the contradictory tenets are errors. There is a poetry, for instance, of which a man may both know and feel not only that it gives poetic gratification to himself, but that it cannot fail to produce a like effect on every well-constituted and well-educated mind. When an English critic, Rymer, some hundred and fifty years ago, disloyal in his folly, pronounced the tragical part of *Othello* to be plainly none other than a bloody farce, without salt or savour,—when Voltaire scoffed at the

tragedy of Hamlet as a gross and barbarous piece, which would not be tolerated by the vilest rabble of France or Italy, likening it (I give you his own words) to the fruit of the imagination of a drunken savage,—when Steevens, an editor of Shakspeare, said that an Act of Parliament would not be strong enough to compel the perusal of the sonnets and other minor poems of the bard,—when Dr. Johnson remarked that *Paradise Lost* might be read as a duty, but could not be as a pleasure, and pronounced a sweeping condemnation on Milton's incomparable *Lycidas*,—when, in our own day, a Scotch critic, Lord Jeffrey, declared of Wordsworth's majestic poem, *The Excursion*, that “it would never do,”—in each of these opinions I know, as anybody may, with a confidence not short of demonstration, I know that there was gross and grievous falsehood. Now, if these opinions are defenceless on the score of variety of mind, and safely to be stigmatized as rash and irrational judgments, it follows that there must exist principles to guide to wise conclusions. And how is a theory of criticism to be formed? How, in a matter in which men are apt to think and feel so differently, to have such various fancies, prejudices, and prepossessions,—how are we to get at the truth? The process of criticism is a process of induction; and, happily, we have the pages of Spenser and Shakspeare and Milton to gather instruction from;—happily, I say, for no one is so bold or so stupid in paradox as to question the sufficiency of such authorities. But induction is something more than the gathering of examples, more than what is often thought to be all-sufficient,—mere observation and experiment. The pages of the mighty poets cannot of themselves bestow the power to recognise and to feel what they contain. All their utterance may be unheeded; and it is only when the human spirit has studied its own nature that the sounds which before passed over it as idly and as noiselessly as a floating cloud make the spiritual music which is poetry. It is not enough to know the voice and the tones of poetry, but to discover the avenues of the human heart which lie open to them, and which send back the music echoed from its depths. These are the sources of that wisdom which enables us to distinguish the truth of poetic inspiration from that which is counterfeit and delusive. I know not where else to search for the elements of criticism than in the minstrelsy of the mighty dead, and the life which is the pulse of every living heart.

It would not be inappropriate for me here to examine what is the union of qualifications essential to the character of an enlightened critic of poetry. There is needed a mind at once poetical and philosophical, with powers imaginative and analytical, and not merely the passive

reciency of a correct taste, but the quick sympathy of an active imagination, untrammelled by conventional or technical precepts; a natural sensibility; force and kindly affections; a vigorous and well-disciplined understanding; and a judicial composure dwelling above the clouded and fitful region of prejudice. Let me assure you that when I look forth to the magnificent theme which is before me,—the vast compass of English poetry and its lofty soarings,—no one is more painfully impressed than he who is addressing you with the thought of how much is demanded for the faithful execution of that which he has undertaken.

I have already intimated an opinion that the noblest portion of a nation's literature is its poetry. I am well aware that this is a sentiment in which many minds will be reluctant to concur, and that not a few will utterly revolt at it. We live in an age whose favourite question is, What is the use? The inquiry is a rational one; and equally rational is the conclusion,—that what is useless is contemptible. But the notion of utility is very various, and we must be cautious that we are not condemning by a false standard. In the common business transactions of the world, men are very careful as to the weights and measures they are dealing with. The buyer of a yard of cloth, or a chest of tea, or a prescription of medicine, trusts to an accurate measurement as the means of giving him all that he is entitled to, and, in the last case, saving him from being drugged with more than his malady makes inevitable. Now, when you turn from the world of trade to the inner world of moral and intellectual operations, you will see men weighing and measuring out their judgments and their sentiments with all the confidence of logical deduction from their premises, not dreaming that often in those premises lies the fallacy of a false balance and a crooked rule. The mind, instead of being truly poised, is often perversely planted; and it has its makeweights in the shape of covert prejudices or prepossessions, and thence come distorted judgments and misdirected affections. Eminently is this the case in our estimate of utility, for the obvious reason that, men proposing to themselves different objects to be attained, a pursuit is applauded as useful, or despised as the reverse, just as it may happen to conduce to those ends respectively. Thus, things are judged by standards never meant for them,—a process as senseless as if one sought to measure by a balance or to weigh by a foot-rule. The aim of one man may be wealth; of another, power, political or military; of another, notoriety or fame; of another, ease, eating and drinking and sleeping; of another, knowledge or literary cultivation; of another, the social amelioration of mankind; or, of another, the enlargement of his whole being by the improve-



ment of every talent which God has given him, and the further-looking hope of the promised happiness of an hereafter. Each one, by a process of reasoning, equal, too, in logical accuracy, reaches a conclusion of his own. And thus the art of book-keeping and the tables of interest are useful; and so is the art of cookery; and so is history, or politics, or the art of war; and so is poetry, and so is the Bible; all useful, each in its own—I need not add how different—way. But the moment you begin to apply to any one the standard proper to another, then comes error, with confusion on confusion. Especially is this the case with regard to literature, and, most of all, to the higher department of imaginative composition. The question to be discussed in its most striking form comes directly to this:—What is the use of poetry? Now, when a question of this sort is made, the answer must depend very much on the temper and the tone in which it is propounded. If it come with a self-sufficient defiance of reply, with that scornful materialism which recognises no standard of value but what affects the outward man,—if it come from that quenchless spirit of traffic whose element is the market, and which concentrates the intensity of man's being—to describe it in a familiar way—within that busy but small portion of the day comprehended between the hours of nine and three, making life a kind of bank-hour existence,—then, I say, the question may, like Pilate's, better remain unanswered; for the very faculties to be addressed are torpid or dead, no more able to take cognizance of the loftier aims of literature than the deaf to delight in music or the blind in colours. There is a wide gulf separating the cold, dark, and indurated heart of the sensual and the mercenary from the imaginative and the spiritual; and it is a vain and almost hopeless thing to try to send the voice across it. If ever the blindness of the clouded heart, purged away in any chance moment, catches a glimpse of the glory enveloping the mighty poets, it sees them only “as trees walking.”

But the inquiry as to the use of poetry may come in a better shape,—the meek questioning of a docile doubt. It may be the craving of a heart yet pure from the pride of materialism in all its forms, and of a young imagination feeble in its apprehensions of imaginative truth; and then no pains should be spared to convince that poetry has, in the highest and truest sense, its use. Criticism has no more precious office than to give its aid “that men may learn more worthily to understand and appreciate what a glorious gift God bestows on a nation when he gives them a poet.” A sense of the dignity of the subject we are approaching makes me solicitous to contribute something to the forma-

tion of correct opinion. It is necessary to go to the root of what is erroneous, and to lay the foundation broadly and deeply for sound principles. Let us, in the first place, observe what is the mode of thinking prevalent in the estimate of poetical composition. I do not mean opinions expressed in the shape of deliberately-framed propositions, but a state of opinion which, while rarely venturing on such expressions, will yet betray itself in numberless indirect forms equally significant. If any one will be at the trouble of observing these, he can scarce fail to perceive signs of a low appreciation of the imaginative department of literature, whether considered in comparison or positively. It is betrayed either by absolute neglect, or by what is far more injurious, because more plausible and offensive,—the habit of alluding to poetry as a mere matter of sentimental recreation, or, at best, a species of elegant trifling, congenial to effeminacy or immaturity of mind rather than to the robust and manly energy of a ripened intellect. I have little doubt that, in many minds, the first association called up by the word “poetry” is the effusion of that generous vanity which gratifies itself in a small way on the pages of albums and scrap-books, and sometimes by a more adventurous flight, as high as the corner of a newspaper. Observe, too, how the title of poet is conferred—in apparent unconsciousness of any absurdity in such use of language—on any stripling, male or female, who accomplishes the feat of stringing together a few sentimental rhymes; and what is more sickening to see is the self-complacency with which the title is received and worn. But the false opinions of poetry stop not at a low estimate, for it is often seen to put on the form of contemptuous repugnance. It is shunned as fostering a dangerous, dreamy, visionary habit of mind, incompatible with the demands of active life. Now, against the folly involved in this egregious misappreciation of the worth of genuine poetry it is hard to argue, for it seldom occurs in the tangible form of distinct avowals. But that it exists, and is influencing the direction of mental pursuits, and affecting the habitual tone of thought and feeling, cannot be doubted by any one who will observe the neglect of poetical literature, or the supercilious spirit with which a poet’s endowments are regarded in comparison with qualifications for other departments of intellectual occupation.

For this there must be some cause;—something, too, which sustains so wide-spread an error. Half the refutation of fallacy will often be the mere discovery of its origin. There is confusion of mind on one point, which greatly contributes to the mistaken opinions under discussion. I allude to the very common and superficial error of identifying

poetry with verse. That verse—the melody of metre and rhyme—is the appropriate diction of true poetry, its outward garb (for a reason I shall hereafter advert to), is perfectly true; but then it is nothing more than the outward form; it is the dress and not the body or the soul of poetry. Very far am I from entertaining those principles of criticism which recognise as poetry imaginative composition divested of metrical expression, which I deem its natural and essential form. But then there may be the form without the appropriate substance. The idea of poetry comprehends verse: but there may be verse without a ray of poetry; and to suppose that dexterity in versifying implies the endowment of a poet's powers is much the same confusion of thought as to think that a military cloak makes a soldier, or an ecclesiastical vestment makes a priest. Thought, whether uttered in prose or verse, may undergo no change with the change of the outward fashion. When verse is mistaken for poetry, discredit is brought on the latter, because it is well known that the making of verses looking indeed very like poetry is within the power of the shallowest intellect. It may be the merest mechanism conceivable. There is a multitude of verses with no more of the life-blood of poetry than there is life in the tattered garments dangling and fluttering on a stick to frighten the fowls of the air from a growing crop. To place the mere versifier in the same category with the genuine poet is the gross fallacy of giving to the butterfly, the bat, and the winged insect brotherhood with the dove and the eagle. It is a false affinity, from which true imagination has always revolted. The classical student will, on a moment's reflection, recall the feelings in this particular of more than one of the Roman satirists; but I know no passage of the kind finer than one in which that vigorous dramatist, Ben Jonson, at once spurns his false brethren and vindicates his own high calling in a strain that rises on the blast of a magnanimous indignation:—

“ I can approve  
 The state of Poesy, such as it is,  
 Blessed, eternal, and most true divine.  
 Indeed, if you will look on Poesy  
 As she appears in many, poor and lame,  
 Patch'd up in remnants and old worn-out rags,  
 Half starved for want of her peculiar food,  
 Sacred invention, then I must confirm  
 Both your conceit and censure of her merit:—  
 But view her in her glorious ornaments,  
 Attired in the majesty of Art,  
 Set high in spirit with the precious taste  
 Of sweet Philosophy; and, which is most,

Crown'd with the rich traditions of a soul  
 That hates to have her dignity profaned  
 With any relish of an earthly thought :  
 Oh, then how proud a presenee doth she bear !  
 Then she is like herself,—fit to be seen  
 Of none but grave and conseerated eyes.  
 Nor is it any blemish to her fame  
 That such lean, iguorant, and blasted wits,  
 Such brainless gulls, should utter their stolen wares  
 With such applauses in our vulgar ears ;  
 Or that their slubber'd lines have eurrent pass  
 From the fat judgments of the multitude ;  
 But that this barren and infetted age  
 Should set no difference 'twixt these empty spirits  
 And a true poet, than which reverend name  
 Nothing can more adorn humanity."

The reproach of the debasement of poetie inspiration to unworthy or corrupt uses is thus repelled by a later poet, when he proclaims that

"Deathless powers to verse belong ;  
 And they like demigods are strong  
 On whom the Muses smile ;  
 But some their function have diselaim'd,  
 Best pleased with what is aptliest framed  
 To enervate and defile.

"Nor such the spirit-stirring note  
 When the live ehords Aleæus smote,  
 Inflamed by sense of wrong.  
 'Woe ! woe to tyrants !' from the lyre  
 Broke threateningly, in sparkles dire  
 Of fierce, vindictive song.

"And not unhallow'd was the page,  
 By wingéd love inscribed to assuage  
 The pangs of vain pursuit ;  
 Love listening while the Lesbian maid  
 With finest touch of passion sway'd  
 Her own Æolian lute." \*

Let me here remark that the purpose of this course is not to encourage poetical composition. I have no such thought ; but I am not without a hope that it may so far contribute to the appreeiation of the poetie function as to prevent the puny ambition of weaving verses under the delusion that the production is poetry. It is a weak

\* Wordsworth's "September."

waste of time, requiring very little intellect, no feeling, and no imagination, and yet very apt to foster a habit of self-beguiling vanity. This course on the English Poets is to persuade not to the writing, but to the reading, of poetry. Where the rare inspiration does exist, it is a fire self-sustaining in the spirit to which it is given, and the stranger's hand can neither fan nor quench it. It has been finely remarked that there can be poetry in the writings of few men, but it ought to be in the hearts and lives of all.

This cause just noticed is not adequate fully to explain the phenomena of opinions under discussion. There must be some deeper and more abiding motive for the tendency to disparage the productions of imagination. The defence of poetry is no new topic. In entering on the illustration of this department of English Literature, I feel as if I could scarce venture to advance without vindicating the worth and dignity of the subject; and when I reflect that, very nearly three hundred years ago, there was given to the world a celebrated treatise on this very subject, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that there must be some cause, deep seated in the nature of mankind, and stronger than any temporary or local influence, which engenders mistaken notions respecting this department of imaginative literature. I cannot omit commending to the student of English literature the treatise alluded to,—“The Defence of Poetry, by Sir Philip Sydney,”—as well for its intrinsic merit, and as the production of the earliest good prose-writer in the language, as for the distinguished interest attaching to the personal character and history of the author,—the matchless model of a modern knight,—a soldier, a statesman, and a scholar, over whose early death on the field of battle a whole kingdom mourned, and of whom a literary antiquary has asserted that two hundred authors could be counted who have spoken his praises. “I have,” are Sydney's words, “just cause to make a pitiful defence of poor Poetry, which, from almost the highest estimation of learning, has fallen to be the laughing-stock of children.” He figuratively addressed his contemporaries “as born so near the dull-making cataract of Nilus that they could not hear the planet-like music of Poetry; as having so earth-creeping minds that they could not lift themselves to the sky of Poetry.” Some verses written by an obscure poet shortly after the “Defence” thus acknowledged the benefit it conferred:

“ Good poets were in high esteem  
 When learning grew in price;  
 Their virtue and their verse did seem  
 A great rebuke to vice.



“ With blunt, base people of small sense  
 They fall now in disdain ;  
 But Sydney’s book in their defence  
 Did raise them up again ;

“ And sets them next divines in rank,  
 As members meet and fit  
 To strike the world’s blind boldness blank,  
 And whet the bluntest wit.”

But, after all, poetry must be its own vindication ; and it is an interesting fact that, at the very time Sydney was composing his defence, Spenser and Shakspeare were revolving the elements of their great imaginings. The dulness Sydney complained of was the dark hour before the coming dawn. His plea touched the slumbering spirit of his nation, like the breath of morning, waking them to a day more glorious than ever shone on the human intellect.

I have alluded to Sir Philip Sydney’s work, not only because its rank in English literature entitles it to passing notice, but because it shows a depreciation of the poetic art in various ages. I doubt not it is a prejudice as ancient as poetry itself, and that it will last while the world lasts, modified, indeed, as I shall endeavour presently to show, by the distinctive spirit of the times. The *constitutional* infirmity of man is his proneuess to materialism. I use the word in its largest sense, to express the teudency to limit our aims and desires to results which are called practical because they are palpable and measurable ; the overvaluing the world of sense, and the consequent undervaluing the world of spirit ; the forgetfulness of the nobler part of our complex nature—the inner life, because the calls for outward life are louder and unceasing. It brings, too, the inability to rise under the pressure of that narrow period enveloping each passing point of time which we call the present ; and thus, just in proportion as the heart becomes materialized, does it go stumbling on in its blindness, borrowing no ray from past or future, each step with no more than its own light, and that not from the spiritual within, but the dim glimmering of the senses. One generation may be more imbruted in its sensuality than another,—one race more than another ; as the same clime where breathed the Athenian fed the Spartan and the Bœotian. But the common curse upon humanity is that it is of the earth, earthy. Whatever conflicts with this corruption is doomed to encounter neglect and obloquy. The functions of all true poetry are spiritual. Whatever form the prejudice may assume,—whether ignorant or contemptuous neglect or direct reprobation,—the solution of it is to be found in the contrariety between the works of pure imagination and a corrupt

tendency of human nature ; that which is material perpetually striving for ascendancy over that which is spiritual. In the palmy days of Grecian mythology there were, I doubt not, those who deemed the acorns that fell from the mysterious oaks at Dodona more precious than the inspirations uttered from those sacred groves.

This influence, common to all ages of the world, because constitutional to humanity, may be aggravated by other agencies in different ages of civilization. Our own has its marked characteristics,—its good and its evil tendencies. I should very inadequately discuss the subject under consideration, were I to omit to inquire in what the spirit of our times affects the appreciation of the works of imagination ; whether the faculty embodies the creations on the canvas, or in marble, or in the noblest mould of inventive genius,—in language. The principles of this discussion have, it may be readily seen, an application to the province of the painter and the sculptor as well as to the most intellectual of the Fine Arts, which forms our subject. The age we live in claims to be in an uncommon degree enlightened. And what are the grounds of its pride ? During the past thirty or forty years, advances have been made in the physical sciences transcending, as far as we have the means of comparison, anything achieved in the same department in any former period of the world. The results of this development are manifest in all the avenues of civilization ; and so multitudinous are the combinations of material agencies, such the intellectual mastery over the blind elements, that no limit seems to be set in this respect to human expectation. The mind has scarce time to recover from its admiration of some invention or achievement by powers disclosed by mechanical science, before it is called away to some new exploit. It is but lately, for instance, that the continents of Europe and America have suddenly been, to all practical purposes, brought twice as near to each other as they ever were before. Again, within a year or so, we were told that a French chemist had gained the power of giving permanency to the fleeting reflections of a mirror : that was listened to with astonishment, and something of incredulity, which have now passed wholly away. And thus we seem to be living amid a succession of nine-days' wonders. To regard this state of things with regret or complaint would obviously be in a high degree irrational as well as unmanly. On the contrary, the prodigious progress of physical science and the attendant arts is a fit subject of congratulation, bringing, as it does, manifold amelioration in all that concerns our physical existence. Besides, I could not bring myself to indulge for one moment a sentiment of jealousy or disparagement of physical science ; for often have I wit-

nessed with admiration the single-hearted devotion of the man of science to the vast department of his investigations,—single-hearted in his seeking after *truth*, and indignant at the utilitarian question which would limit the range of inquiry to obvious and immediate results. The genius of true poetry is not daunted by the speed of science. But there is an inquiry of grave import, which, in our exultation, we are apt to overlook. The peril incident to fallen humanity is forgotten,—that blessings come not unalloyed, and that, abused, they may be perverted into evils. It is fit, therefore, to ask whether the improvements upon which our age prides itself are so absolutely unqualified as to justify the rather contemptuous compassion for the unilluminated condition of our forefathers. Is it all profit and no loss? Are we quite safe in reposing upon our gains with a confidence that nothing of our treasures has imperceptibly been allowed to pass away? In noticing what I believe to be some of the characteristic errors and frailties of our times, I am anxious to speak with modesty; and therefore I quote the language of an author by whom it has been well remarked that, “in regard to the supposed superiority of the present age, the mistake arises in various ways. A part of knowledge, perhaps the least important, is put for the whole; no balance is struck between what is gained in one department and what is lost in another; the worthiness of the ends pursued is not considered in determining the value of the means; the economy of wealth is taken as the measure of national welfare; legislation passes for jurisprudence. So, again, the study of nature may have flourished, the study of mind may have drooped; the arts of life may have advanced, domestic wisdom may have lost ground; education may have been diffused, learning may have declined. All our gains are counted; but our losses are not set against them. And, again, personal comfort, convenience, or luxury, mental or bodily, is openly proposed, not only as the best, but as the only, object of intellectual pursuit; whereas, formerly, the search of truth was supposed to bring its own recompense. Thus, a lower end is substituted for a higher; and by overstating the claims of our fellow-creatures, once too much neglected in these studies, we forget the more sublime relation between the human spirit and the God who gave it.”

These traits in the spirit of our times are characterized by another writer, in an eloquent and philosophical passage bearing more immediately on the subject I am discussing. “Men have been pressing forward for some time in a path which has betrayed by its fruitfulness, furnishing them constant employment for picking up things about their feet when thoughts were perishing in their minds. While mechanic



arts, manufactures, agriculture, commerce, and all those products of knowledge which are confined to gross, definite, and tangible objects, have, with the aid of experimental philosophy, been every day putting on more brilliant colours, the splendour of imagination has been fading. Sensibility, which was formerly a generous nursling of rude nature, has been chased from its ancient range in the wide domain of patriotism and religion, with the weapons of derision, by a shadow calling itself Good Sense; calculations of presumptuous expediency, groping its way among partial and temporary consequences, have been substituted for the dictates of paramount and infallible conscience, the supreme embracer of consequences; lifeless and circumspect decencies have banished the graceful negligence and unsuspecting dignity of virtue." It is scarcely necessary to remark that an age thus characterized must be in a great degree unimaginative, and its tendencies adverse to poetic culture. Look round upon society, and you behold on every side symptoms of restless curiosity, and the love of outward excitement stimulated to so high a pitch that the strenuous exercises of imagination and all spiritual thought are neglected as uncongenial, or despised as visionary. We live in turmoil; and the man who dares to pause but for brief meditation is in danger of being trodden down by the throng that is pressing forward. Philosophy must deal with handicrafts, with steam, with the crucible, with magnetism, with storms, with manufactures, with exports and imports and the currency; but, if it seek its ancient track,—the human spirit and all the immaterial life that it sustains,—the world turns away from it as from useless scholastic speculation. It may be tolerated as a piece of monastic harmlessness, but no more, in the necessities of over-active existence. In a state of opinion where such principles are dominant, poetry of a high order will in vain claim from the many the affectionate homage which its votaries render. In the strife between the antagonist elements of our complex being, the mastery is too often won by the sensual over the spiritual; and hence it is that man is said to live by sight rather than by faith,—a life adverse alike to all that is religious and all that is imaginative. A great poet, standing by the seaside, conscious of the influence of natural objects, and conscious, too, of the apathy of a worldly-minded generation, boldly recoils from the materialism and infidelity of a Christian age as more uncongenial than the fond aspirations even of Paganism.

"The world is too much with us. Late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers :  
Little we see in nature that is ours ;  
We have given our hearts away,—a sordid boon !

This sea, that bares her bosom to the moon,—  
 The winds, that will be howling at all hours,  
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,—  
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
 It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be  
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn—  
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,  
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathéd horn."

There is another influence adverse to imaginative culture. It is not only that one part of knowledge, and that not affecting the highest and most permanent interests of mankind, has usurped too large a space in the public thought, but there has been a tendency to unequal cultivation of some of the chief faculties of the mind. This is not the occasion to examine that modern mental philosophy which, rife especially on the rank soil of France and in the years of its revolution, was disseminated in the latter part of the last century. Enough for my present purpose is it to say that it gave to one power of the mind a supremacy which has proved injurious to the just distribution of all. The calculating faculty of the understanding has been made the sole arbiter to which the other reflective faculties and imagination and the moral powers are to bow as vassals. This has led to a false confidence in a dangerous guide; for never is man more apt to go astray than when, casting away all other light, he follows implicitly the leading of mere reasoning. Reason (I use the term in the sense of the logical faculty), alienating itself in its usurpations from the other powers, becomes wilful, rash, and tyrannous. Thence comes a self-confidence in the age which casts off time-honoured associations with the past, and thus, to borrow a fine expression, "covenant is broken with the mighty dead." Thence come the thousand theories which unceasingly are flitting across the public mind:—theories of education, mental and bodily, theories of social and political regeneration, and theories of religion. Thence has come the revolution we have witnessed in the fashion of children's books; the healthy, imaginative, old-fashioned story-books displaced by preposterous devices to fill the young heart with pedantry. We are cramped by false and narrow systems of metaphysics, teaching that wisdom is to be drawn from one reservoir, when, the truth is, it is flowing from a hundred springs,—imagination, the affections, faith, prayer, and whatever else helps to guide and chasten intellectual action. There is a danger, it has been well said, "that the perfections and achievements of intellect will be too much prized, too much desired, too much sought

for. Already there are many who expect from human knowledge the work of divine grace. Science has made man master of matter; it has enabled him to calculate the revolutions of nature, to multiply his own powers beyond all that was dreamed of spell or talisman: and now it is confidently prophesied that another science is to remove all the moral and political evils of the planet; that by analyzing the passions we shall learn to govern them; and that, when the science of education is grown of age, virtue will be taught as easily as arithmetic and comprehended as readily as geometry with the aid of wooden diagrams. Let us not be deceived. 'Leviathan is not so tamed.' The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life."

I am speaking of the propensity of the age,—a propensity happily controlled by salutary checks. But, if any one desire to know what is the utmost peril when such restraints are removed, he may turn to the spectacle of revolutionary France, when, in the highest paroxysm of rational regeneration, there was paraded a living representation of the goddess of Reason, which the philosophers bade the people worship; and what the idol was I dare not venture even to name to you.

But, bringing these general observations to bear upon our subject,—when such a condition of thought becomes predominant, in what estimation may we expect to find the power of imagination? Very much what in point of fact may be observed to exist. It will be regarded as that faculty which gives birth to novels and romances and other idle fictions; which leads men into wild and extravagant speculations, and tempts some to add superfluous ornaments to their statements of matters of fact. What is the nature and the true functions of genuine imagination I shall endeavour to show hereafter, my present purpose being only to suggest how a particular habit of opinion may bring disparagement upon one of the chief endowments of the human spirit. Vibrating as the judgment is apt to do from one extreme to another, the question may be asked, whether the censure of undue exaltation of the reasoning faculties is meant to be dissuasive from its cultivation, or to suggest the propriety of suspending them by processes of the imagination. I have intimated nothing of the kind. The error would then be great, though in another direction. The disproportionate exercise of our faculties is an evil, no matter what the disproportion may chance to be. When I complain that one of these faculties is neglected and often sacrificed, it would be strange indeed were I to fall into the snare of encouraging a like neglect of others. On this point let me sustain myself by what seems to me the wise authority of an eloquent writer:—

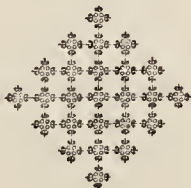
"The imagination, if left without restraint to follow its own conceits,

is vain and wild, and teems with fantastic superstitions; the understanding, unless other powers elevate and ennoble it, is narrow and partial, and empirical and superficial. While the reason is cultivated let not the other faculties be neglected; let it substantiate its forms and give them a body of sound experiential and historical knowledge; and let not this body be without the beautiful, ever-varying hues, the glowing flushes and ardent glances of the imagination. So may it become an edifice wherein wisdom may not be ashamed to take up her dwelling. No one of the powers with which God has endowed us is useless; no one is meant to lie waste, no one to run waste. Only when they are knit together and working in unison and harmony, may we hope that the vision of truth will descend upon them."

I have thus endeavoured to trace to its sources the tendency to disparage the study of poetry as an intellectual occupation. If we can satisfy our minds that such a state of opinion has its origin in the causes suggested,—the indiscriminate confusion of all verse, no matter how vapid and unimaginative, with true poetry; the perpetual, because constitutional, proneness to suffer materialism and materialized notions to encroach on the spiritual endowments of humanity; the almost exclusive appropriation of the title of philosophy to mechanical science, looking only to the world of sense; and the undue exaltation of the reasoning faculty over all other mental powers,—it is enough to bring somewhat of conviction that the opinion itself is error. But the refutation of objections is not enough: a subject must be set on the independent foundation of its own principles. I have felt that I could not safely advance without an attempt to dispose of the preliminary considerations which have been noticed. This makes it necessary to defer to the next lecture the main introductory subject,—the nature of Poetry, with an examination of its inspiration, its relation to the Fine Arts, and the moral uses of a cultivated imagination,—and, after that, to proceed to the glorious registry of our English poets.

In conclusion, one word of a personal nature. This course of lectures has been prompted by the belief that it was due from me to this community, considering my position in this ancient Philadelphia institution. It is the result of mature reflection, with a full sense of the obstacles and discouragements which it may encounter. Be those discouragements what they may, standing on the ground of duty, this post of mine shall not be deserted. I have sought to place before the public a plan the subject of which I know to be worthy their consideration. But how far the lecturer may be esteemed competent to the task he has ventured on, it would be indecorous for

me to indulge the most distant fancy. It will not, however, be too much for me to say that I stand here not a suppliant for favours, but with the consciousness of a single and an honourable purpose in the cause of literature; and to add that, while I form no conjecture how many of my friends I may have the pleasure of seeing here again, no contingency of that sort shall prevent the prosecution of this enterprise to its completion.





## LECTURE II.

THE NATURE OF POETRY AND ITS MINISTRATIONS—IMAGINATIVE CAPACITY—LORD BACON'S VIEW—MILTON'S—POETRY A DIVINE EMANATION—ITS FOUNDATION IS TRUTH—THE TRUTH OF INNER LIFE—PAINTING AND SCULPTURE—POETRY AN IMITATIVE ART—THE CHILD AND THE SHELL—SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION OF TRUTH—HUMAN SYMPATHY CULTIVATED BY POETRY—IMMORTALITY—SPIRITUAL ASPIRATIONS—STOICISM IRRECONCILABLE WITH POETRY—LOYALTY AND CHIVALRY—THE SONGS OF ISRAEL—TASTE, A WRONG NAME—MENTAL INACTIVITY INCONSISTENT WITH CRITICISM—DUE PROPORTION OF INTELLECTUAL POWERS—WALTER SCOTT AND SIR PHILIP SYDNEY.

HAVING in my last lecture endeavoured to remove some preliminary obstacles to an entrance on our subject, I wish now to proceed to the consideration of the nature of poetry and its ministrations, the poet's mission to his fellow-beings, and his powers. This is equivalent to an examination of the faculty of imagination; for poetry is the voice of imagination. The two are inseparable; and it is one and the same thing to study the nature of that endowment, the moral uses of a cultivated imagination, and the purposes of genuine poetry.

The duty of cultivation, let me observe in the first place, rests on the possession of each power of the human mind. One of the universal endowments, infinitely different indeed in its degrees, is the faculty of imagination; and it would be strangely interpreting God's scheme in the government of the world to suppose that this mighty power was bestowed for no other than the pitiful offices often deemed its distinctive functions. It has more precious trusts than the production of tawdry romances or sentimental novels. The very existence of imagination is a proof that it is an agency which may be improved to our good, or neglected and abused to our harm. Even if it were beyond our comprehension to conceive how it may be auxiliary to humanity, it would be no more than a simple impulse of faith to feel that, so surely as it *is* an element implanted in our nature, it is there to be nurtured and strengthened by thoughtful exercise. But we are not left to the strenuous effort of implicit faith; for the purposes of the endowment are manifest and multifarious. It has been well demanded, "To what end have we been endowed with the creative faculty of the imagination, which glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, vivifies

what to the eye seems lifeless, and actuates what to the eye seems torpid, combines and harmonizes what to the eye seems broken and disjointed, and infuses a soul with thought and feeling into the multitudinous fleeting phantasmagoria of the senses? To what end have we been so richly endowed, unless—as the prime object and appointed task of the reason is to detect and apprehend the laws by which the almighty Lawgiver upholds and ordains the world he has created—it be in like manner the province and the duty of the imagination to employ itself diligently in perusing and studying the symbolical characters wherewith God has engraven the revelations of his goodness on the interminable scroll of the visible universe?”

But it is important to cite the highest possible authority; and I know not where I can better look for it than in that almost superhuman survey of human knowledge contained in the philosophy of Lord Bacon. Words of wisdom are there which cast their light on almost all the paths of mental inquiry; and on the present occasion I seek them with special earnestness, because of the superficial notion that the Baconian philosophy took thought of the domains of only physical investigation. It can, however, be shown that among the objects of inquiry to which he pointed attention was, how the imagination may be fortified and exalted; and his brief but celebrated passage on Poetry may be aptly repeated:—“The use of this feigned history hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it, the world being, in proportion, inferior to the soul; by reason whereof there is, agreeable to the spirit of man, a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety, than can be found in the nature of things. Therefore, because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical; because true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merit of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution and more according to revealed providence; because history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore poesy endueth them with more rareness and more unexpected variations: so, as it appeareth, that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity and delectation; and, therefore, it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.”

In these pregnant sentences, worthy of deep reflection, may be dis-

covered the germs of the whole philosophy of poetry; and he who will follow as far as they light him in the paths of truth will leave far behind the questions and the cavils respecting the endowments of imagination. I have no desire to lead you into the tangles of metaphysics; but I beg your reflection on the passage cited, because it is the highest authority to be found in philosophy. The leading thought in this profound meditation of Bacon's, as I understand it, is that there dwells in the human soul a sense—a faculty—a power of some kind, call it by what name you may—which craves more than this world affords, and which gives birth to aspirations after something better than the events of our common life; and that the poet's function is to minister to this want. From the earliest records of literature, the creations of poetry in all ages have found a congeniality in the breast of man, though the world might be searched in vain for the archetypes of those creations. A great modern poet boldly tells us of

“ The gleam,  
The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the poet's dream ;”

and yet the heart takes those dreams home to itself for realities. Humanly speaking, this is mysterious in our nature. When a mind like Bacon's is brought to the contemplation, it penetrates to the centre of the mystery, and intimates that the solution is to be found only in the inspired record of the history of the human soul; that its mingled majesty and poverty, its aspiration and its destitution, are to be traced to the fall from primeval purity. There was a time when the human soul and the world in which it was dwelling were better mated; when the discord and incongruity described by Bacon had not begun:—

“ Upon the breast of new-created earth  
Man walk'd; and wheresoe'er he moved,  
Alone or mated, solitude was not.  
He heard upon the wind the articulate voice  
Of God; and angels to his sight appear'd,  
Crowning the glorious hills of Paradise,  
Or through the groves gliding, like morning mist  
Enkindled by the sun. He sat and talk'd  
With wingéd messengers, who daily brought  
To his small island in the ethereal deep  
Tidings of joy and love.”

The loss of innocence was the beginning of a new era in the history of our race. I have no desire to indulge in speculation on a subject



which has perplexed theology; enough is it to believe what we are taught by God's own word:—that the fall was a moral and physical revolution. But we are not taught, either by that oracle or by the study of the mind, that the primal glory was wholly quenched. The faculties of man, fearfully disordered and corrupted, had still some remnant of their original endowments; and, to the mind of the great English sage, the aspirations of poetry appeared as the struggles of a once pure but fallen humanity,—the strife of the mingled elements of our nature,—the image of the Deity in which man was created, and the dust into which his soul was breathed.

From Lord Bacon's magnificent exposition I must pass on to another great tribute paid to poetry. His was the thought of the philosopher calmly looking (as Cowley said of him) "from the mountain-top of his exalted wit." Let me, in the next place, offer to your consideration some of the expressions of the lofty ideas of a *poet* upon his own art. I do not wish to anticipate what I shall have to say hereafter in the course respecting the great English epic poet; but I need his authority for the worth of poetic wisdom, coming as it does with such weight from one who realized so gloriously his own high conceptions of his calling.

In the spirit of Milton, imagination brought an instinctive sense of its majesty, which bursts forth in its own sublime vindication,—probably the most eloquent annunciation of the functions of the imagination ever uttered.

"These abilities (by which the grandest poetry is produced), where-soever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit to unbind and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of pious nations doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable or grave,—whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is called fortune from without, or the wily subtilties and refluxes of man's thought from within,—all these things, with a solid and treatable smoothness, to point out and describe."

With such thoughts of the poet's office, Milton went on in a prophetic mood to covenant for the production, after some years, of a work "not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine, like

that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist or the trencher-fury of a rhyming parasite,—not to be obtained by invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughter,—but *by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.*”

After this, need I seek to accumulate authorities? What more could be added to language radiant with the yet-distant splendour of the *Paradise Lost*? Leaving far beneath all the low and little estimates of poetry, it is worthy of meditation that both by Bacon and Milton the poet’s function has a participation of divineness. This is in accordance with the testimony of time, as it may be discovered in language employed by various nations and in various ages. The classical student need not be reminded of the derivative sense of the title of poet,—a meaning more obvious in former days, when the old English word “maker” had not fallen into disuse. Alluding to another ancient tongue than that from which our word “poet” has been derived, a writer of the seventeenth century remarks,—

“T was surely prophetic that the name  
Of prophet and of poet was the same;”

and Cowper has the lines,

“In a Roman mouth the graceful name  
Of prophet and of poet was the same.”

A later poet, speaking of the greatest endowment of imagination, does not fear to style it

“The vision and the faculty *divine* ;”

and the common voice of mankind recognises how sacred a thing is a true poet’s power, when, without any sense of profanity, it calls it by the hallowed name of *inspiration*.

In this use of words there is a meaning; for never can words live for ages on the lips of men unless they have in them the life-sustaining principles of truth. It becomes therefore a grave inquiry in what sense the poet’s employment is said to be in a region of divinity. It partakes of a divineness, to borrow Lord Bacon’s phrase, both in its modes-of action and in the ends it aims at. The poet’s chief province is invention and imagination,—the creative power of the human spirit, as described in an admirable passage of Shakspeare but too familiar to quote, bodying forth the shapes of things unknown. The boundless scope of poetic invention I hope to illustrate hereafter, when we come to survey

the creative energy in all its varied forms of our English poets, better than now by abstract description. Poetry, as the word originally signified, is *creation*, and in this (let it reverently be said) lies its divinity. It is creative;—not by step-by-step attainments of the reasoning faculties, but by processes which philosophy has not yet analyzed. I do not question that imagination, like the other intellectual powers, has its laws; but so rare is the endowment in its high degree that mental science has devised no theory explanatory of its mode of action. For instance, the visionary world that Shakspeare called into existence and peopled with creations is mysterious if the attempt is made to explain it apart from the action of the imagination. Even then, accustomed as men are to regard chiefly the more subordinate operations of the mind, it raises admiration to see how, taking names and events obscure by a remote antiquity, he has animated them with more of life and of truth than ever could have been gained from the chronicles or history. In God's providence over the human race, a great poet is given rarely, and therefore stands apart and above millions of his kind; and hence, when they behold him, not toiling with tedious and unsteady deductions, but scattering the light of truth from the fire kindled within his spirit, they give to that fire the name of "inspiration." But the divineness poetry partakes of is attributable also to its efficacy in accomplishing higher purposes than any other department of literature. The chief aim of all genuine poetry is to teach by imaginary examples and by the embodiment of abstract truths. The element in which poetry dwells is *truth*; and when imagination divorces itself from that relation, it declines into the neighbourhood of empty fictions or the dreams of lunacy. But there is a prevalent notion that imagination is the power that especially draws away from truth; and hence it is looked on with apprehensive distrust. Doubtless it is liable to grievous abuse; and so, let it be remembered, is every talent committed to man, for cultivation or for culpable neglect. But, when the inventions of poetic genius are confounded with falsehood, it is prejudice and vulgar error. It is a narrow conception of truth which confines it to what are called matters of fact,—events which have actually transpired, and which would exclude even the truths of exact science. There are truths of our inner life as well as of the outward,—spiritual and visionary,—of the imagination and the feelings as well as of the senses. The record of a criminal trial, with all the details of evidence fortified by the sanction of an oath, is matter-of-fact truth; and yet there is a higher and better truth—more of the essence of truth, and therefore more permanent—in the imaginative story of the conscience-stricken

agonies of Macbeth,—the blood-stained hauntings of remorse pursuing its victim as he is plunged lower and lower in the depths of crime. What actual incidents are more true than the tumultuous heart-breaking of King Lear? “Facts are fleeting, perishable things; but the spiritual creations of a true poet’s imagination are truths that wake to perish never!”

The prime virtue of all the imitative arts—painting and sculpture as well as poetry—is the representation of their archetypes imaginatively. The characteristic of the productions of a genuine artist is the predominance of imagination, without which they sink into servile and mechanical copying; and it can scarcely escape the observation of any one who will examine the style of a portrait from a master’s hand, and that of an inferior artist, that the exactness of a likeness mechanically identical with its original does not make the same impression of truth as those indescribable touches which appeal through the eye to the imagination. But I beg you also to observe that it is part of the very nature of each one of the Fine Arts to pause in the process of imitation at a point beyond which the beholder’s imagination, aroused by what is given, moves on unconsciously to the completion of the work. It is the painter’s part so to combine imaginatively light and shade and colour, that we gaze on the canvas without a thought that the imitation of form is supplied by the instinctive action of imagination. Again, the sculptor’s part is the imitation of form; and he works in marble because its purity is the fit material for his abstractions from colour. Thus it is that painting and sculpture have their respective purposes, beyond which they do not aspire, each attaining what the other omits; and the pleasure derived from each is made up of what the eye beholds and the imagination supplies, the impression thus gained from a true work of art being that of truth in its full integrity. This is imaginative imitation. Now, there is another species of work more ambitious than either sculpture or painting; for it disdains the bounds of each; and it might be thought that if there was any mode of representing the human countenance so that there should be at the same time resemblance of form as in bust or statue, and also of colour as in painting, this would be the most excellent imitation. There seems to be a good deal of reason in this: the likeness would be so complete there would be no need for the help of the imagination and no danger of its leading astray. This would be what might be called matter-of-fact imitation. And if any one is disposed to think that it must be more true because more exact, let him compare the impression made by a piece of sculpture or of painting with that of a figure or bust in wax-



work. The imaginative delight awakened by the former is changed into disgust increasing with the closeness of resemblance, producing a kind of indignation at what seems like a device to cheat the senses.

The affinity between poetry and the other Fine Arts—painting and sculpture—lies in the principle common to them all, and which is the very essence of imaginative imitation,—the blending, in all genuine works of art, likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference. This, when first suggested, seems paradoxical. But, to show how essential an element difference is in such imitation, I need only remind you of the stony and colourless imitation in sculpture, and that there could be no greater outrage upon taste and the principles of the art than any attempt to remove that difference by superadding to the likeness of form the likeness of colour. Now, in poetry, the medium of imitation is the more subtle one of language, and the imagination and the feelings are to be moved by means of words as the painter moves them by the visible tints upon the canvas or the sculptor by marble. The impression made by a great poem and a great painting or statue are kindred and analogous; having a common origin in the creative energy of genius, they are addressed to the same faculty of imagination, and therefore the spiritual agency of all of them is alike. How close is this affinity may be shown by the compositions in which poets convey the impressions made on them by the other arts. A picture, for instance, of two females, by Leonardo da Vinci, has occasioned these lines, in which a woman's imagination has made words subserve the purpose of the canvas :—

“The lady Blanche, regardless of all her lover's fears,  
To the Ursuline convent hastens, and long the abbess hears :—  
‘Oh, Blanche, my child, repent ye of the courtly life ye lead!’  
Blanche lookéd on a rose-bud, and little seem'd to heed.  
She lookéd on the rose-bud, she lookéd round, and thought  
On all her heart had whisper'd and all the nun had taught :—  
‘I am worshippéd by lovers, and brightly shines my fame;  
All Christendom resoundeth the noble Blanche's name!  
Nor shall I quickly wither, like the rose-bud from the tree,  
My queen-like graces shining when my beauty's gone from me.  
But, when the sculptured marble is raiséd o'er my head,  
And the matchless Blanche lies lifeless among the noble dead,  
This saintly Lady Abbess hath made me justly fear  
It nothing will avail me that I was worshipp'd here.’”

Within the last two hours I have had the gratification of viewing an exquisite piece of art, which has presented to my mind the finest illustration I have ever met with of the affinity between poetry and other

imitative arts. The work alluded to, I am proud to say, graces the home of a Philadelphia gentleman, one to whose enlightened patronage the cause of the Fine Arts is greatly indebted. It is a piece of statuary embodying a sculptor's happy imagination who probably had no thought that the same conception had been embodied by a poet's words,—a passage in the "Excursion" presenting the same image :—

" I have seen  
A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract  
Of inland ground, applying to her ear  
The convolutions of a smooth-lipp'd shell,  
To which, in silence hush'd, her very soul  
Listen'd intensely, and her countenance soon  
Brighten'd with joy ; for, murmuring from within,  
Were heard sonorous cadences, whereby,  
To her belief, the monitor express'd  
Mysterious union with its native sea."

Nor can I omit the fine description, by Landor, of the

" Sinuous shells of pearly hue  
Within, and they that lustre have imbibed  
In the sun's palace-porch, where, when unyoked,  
His chariot-wheel stands midway in the wave.  
Shake one, and it awakens ; then apply  
Its polish'd lips to your attentive ear,  
And it remembers its august abodes,  
And murmurs, as the ocean murmurs there."

I have spoken of the necessity of some element of difference in all the arts ; and before dismissing this part of the subject, it is proper to inquire what constitutes that difference in poetic imitation. Poetry is separated by a bright distinguishing-line from ordinary language, inasmuch as it not only appropriates to itself the choicest forms of speech, but also the additional graces of metrical harmony. There is thus acquired a power peculiar to poetry in comparison with other compositions ; for it is enabled to address itself to man's natural susceptibility to the beauty of a regular succession of harmonious sounds, and thus music is brought into alliance. It has been frequently suggested that the most ancient poets were led to adopt a metrical form, to enable their hearers, in a barbarous age, more easily to recollect their compositions. If poetry were like the familiar rhymes employed to recall the number of days in each month, the theory might be true ; but, otherwise, it seems to me rather a shallow one. The truth lies deeper, —in the influences exercised over the heart by sound, when controlled



by principles of harmony, and consequently concurrent and subsidiary to the aims of true poetry. Besides, the poet, speaking better thoughts and better feelings than are passing commonly through the minds of men, instinctively seeks, as their appropriate garb, a better language and a better music. The pure heart of poetry needs the voice of the purest and most graceful forms of language. I shall have occasion hereafter to illustrate the admirable adaptation of the English metres to the expression of various passions and feelings and moods of imagination: at present I can only cite a poet's tribute to the influence of melodious though unintelligible sounds,—a tribute in strains as musical as the music they celebrated:—

- “ Behold her, single in the field,  
 Yon solitary Highland lass,  
 Reaping and singing by herself:  
 Stop here, or gently pass.  
 Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
 And sings a melancholy strain.  
 Oh, listen ! for the vale profound  
 Is overflowing with the sound.
- “ No nightingale did ever chant  
 More welcome notes to weary bands  
 Of travellers, in some shady haunt,  
 Among Arabian sands ;  
 Such thrilling voice was never heard  
 In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,  
 Breaking the silence of the seas  
 Among the farthest Hebrides.
- “ Will no one tell me what she sings ?  
 Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
 For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
 And battles long ago.  
 Or is it some more humble lay,  
 Familiar matter of the day,—  
 Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
 That has been, and may be again ?
- “ Whate’er the theme, the maiden sang  
 As if her song could have no ending  
 I saw her singing at her work,  
 And o’er the sickle bending :  
 I listen’d, motionless and still ;  
 And, as I mounted up the hill,  
 The music in my heart I bore  
 Long after it was heard no more.’

Again, inasmuch as one great duty and labour of the human mind is the attainment of truth by the logical and analytical processes of science, it is apt to become an habitual opinion that there is no other truth than scientific truth, forgetting that it belongs to the imagination and the feelings as well as the understanding. Let not my words be perverted for a moment into a disparagement of scientific research; but earnestly do I protest that it is not all. The man of science, wedded to his analytical processes, may bring himself to look on nature with only a scientific eye; and at length the intellectual part of his being may become wholly divorced from the moral. There have been astronomers whose intellects have reached the distant spheres of the material universe and become familiar with the courses of orbs millions of miles on high, whose hearts at the same time grovelled in the most pitiable weakness of infidelity and atheism. The study of nature may be made too exclusively scientific,—the intellect sharpened while the sensibilities and the imagination are deadened. The human form, and the countenance beaming with intelligence and feeling, may to the eye of the anatomist be no more than the flesh and blood clothing a ghastly skeleton. The botanist may walk abroad with his thoughts so busied with processes of classification that the brightest verdure shall not touch his heart. To the mere man of science the rainbow may bring a train of thought on the laws of reflection and refraction, the prismatic colours and their arrangement: it may bring all this; and, if he has cultivated only the analytical powers of his mind, it may bring nothing more. But all the truth is not in the books of Optics. From childhood we are taught that the bow was set in the clouds to inspire confidence and hope in the breasts of those who had witnessed the terrors of the Deluge, and as a perpetual emblem of divine mercy and protection. Knowing by what hand it was placed there, and for what purpose, it is no great stretch of faith to believe that there is in it—we know not how—an intrinsic power to stir in the breast of each descendant of Noah somewhat of the same emotion as it awakened when first resting on the heights of Ararat. With all this, science does not purport to have anything to do; and, accordingly, all that it teaches respecting that phenomenon cannot touch the feeblest sympathy. But there are probably few minds so dull as not to recognise an expression of a feeling of their own in the simple exclamation bursting from a poet's lips:—

“ My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky !  
So was it when my life began ;  
So is it now I am a man ;  
So be it when I shall grow old,  
Or let me die ! ”

The inquiry may naturally suggest itself, whether the imaginative truth which poetry aspires to is not above the reach of humanity, and unavailing therefore to its necessities. Unquestionably, if any one goes forth into active life with an undisciplined imagination, expecting from the world what the world cannot give, the result is as disastrous as the aim is irrational. But if the heart take counsel of imagination for the guidance of its passions, the chastening and elevating of its affections, there is no danger in the *height* of the imaginative standard. In proof of this position there has been conclusively quoted that precept of the Saviour's which bids men, with all the accumulation of their faculties, “ Be perfect,” and, more than that, sets before them for imitation the model inimitable of God's own perfection. The precept may with difficulty be reconciled with the rules of our calculating faculties, but it is addressed to the imagination and comprehended by it. It stands the most sublime of all the divine sentences in the Sermon on the Mount, —the most ennobling and elevating words ever spoken to poor humanity. It may also be noticed, in vindication of the calumniated power under discussion, that the Christian rule for the guidance of our conduct to others is addressed to the imagination ; and thus you may see that one evil of a sluggish imagination will be a sluggish sympathy with our fellow-beings.

But the energies of poetry are employed not only in invention, but in the discovery of truth :—not only, in Lord Bacon's words, “ for the invention of a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety,” but to revive the neglected glories of the world as it is, to gather the fragments of splendour from amid the ruins of our fallen nature, to lift from the soul the weight of custom and materialism, to awaken a consciousness to the neglected emotions of daily life, and to trace the associations between the universe of sense and the spiritual life within us. These are the aims of true poetry ; and to grasp the thoughts and feelings which are perpetually flitting across the mind, eluding the touch of a gross philosophy, there are a thousand influences at work, which in the pride of our calculating faculties are despised, because they are not susceptible of measurement by the understanding. Will any one who has reflected on the constitution of man,

both spiritual and material, and the world in which he is placed, venture to say, for instance, that the sun travels his glorious course only to light men to their work and give them warmth? Why then does he rise in such magnificence, and why set with such ever-varying splendour? Why is it that every unclouded night ten thousand stars are looking down upon us from the heavens? Why is it that even the storm comes arrayed with a sublimity of its own? Why does the earth break forth from its winter's torpor in all the luxuriance of spring? And why is there beauty in the human countenance? Men and women would no doubt accomplish their work as well and be as *useful* if every face we looked on was the face of ugliness. Influences that cannot be expounded are active on every side and during every period of life; and though unimportant when mentioned separately, no one can divine how great is their sway in the formation of human character. Who can explain how music falling on the ear moves the spirit within us? and yet we know that it can give courage in the hour of battle and fervour to acts of devotion. I cannot tell how the soft blue of an unclouded sky so impresses the feelings with a sense of its placid beauty that the heart of him who looks up to it from amidst the turmoil of life is touched as with a blessing; but this I know,—that, when God foretold the curses with which he would visit his rebellious people, among the penalties announced by the inspired lawgiver there was a threat that the sky should be to them like brass.

It is the poet's duty to deepen human sympathies and to enlarge their sphere; to cast a light upon the common heart of the whole race; to calm the anxieties and to sustain the highest and farthest purposes of our being. Imagination, the prime nourisher of hope, is the characteristic of man as a progressive creature; and its most strenuous efforts are given to dignify, to elevate, to purify, and to spiritualize. In the history of the literature of all nations the herald of its day is the morning-star of poetry; and, when it passes away, the last light that lingers after it is the ever-aspiring ray from its setting orb. In all ages and conditions of society it is present; for it is supplied from "the inexhaustible springs of truth and feeling which are ever gurgling and boiling up in the caverns of the human heart." Such being the purpose of poetry, it may be safely said that it is moral wisdom. Its closest affinity is with religion; for it ministers to faith and hope and love. A meek and dutiful attendant in the temple of faith, it is in humble alliance for the defence and rescue of exposed humanity. It has been sagely remarked by a philosophic writer, that the belief is erroneous that the hearts of the many are constitutionally weak, languishing, and slow to

answer the requisitions of things; and that rather the true sorrow of humanity consists in this:—not that the mind fails, but that the course and demands of action and life so rarely correspond with the dignity and intensity of human desires, and hence that which is slow to languish is too easily turned aside and abused. To this are all the great productions of the Muse directed, controlling the discord between the course of life and the dignity of human desires, chastening the passions and guiding them in safe channels and to worthy objects. In Shakspeare's wonderful delineation of the melancholy of Hamlet, it is the representation of a noble heart aching with a sense of the hollowness, the insufficiency of the stale and unprofitable uses of the world to answer its aspirations. There is the wretchedness and the desolation of a spirit feeling itself at variance with life; and this morbid mood of mind speaks in words expressive of a gloomy absence of delight in all he looks upon, and yet at the same time the loftiest consciousness of the endowments of the human soul:—"It goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, this brave o'erhanging firmament,—this majestic roof, fretted with golden fire,—why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"

This is the language of disease,—of disease to which all are exposed, because, amid the frailty and corruption of our natural desires, the heart will sink down to low objects and be perverted to unholy ones. When the supplies of the heart fail and its cravings cannot find their proper nourishment, the world and all that is upon it become unsubstantial and unreal. The life, in which is staked eternal happiness, becomes worthless and barren, as it seemed to the guilty fancy of Macbeth,—“this bank and shoal of time.” It is poetry that is charged with the duty of ministering its help to this peril of humanity. Imagination, chastened and cherished, will discover dignity and happiness in life's lowliest duties, and, rising higher, will behold—as an angel might behold—this earth with its dark sea, with all that is vile upon the surface and with the nations of the dead mouldering beneath, yet a star glittering in the firmament and peopled with beings redeemed for immortality.

If such be the nature and the power of poetry, it should not be difficult to discover some mighty influences exerted by it upon the mind of man. When we look into the region of paganism, what was the high poetry of the ancients but a struggle for something more adequate than



a sensual faith to fill the caverns of the heart? When the knowledge of the Godhead, too vast for the fallen mind, was dispersed into the fantasies of polytheism,—when a thousand deities were enshrined in gorgeous temples and in the household,—when men were bowing down before images, or worshipping the sun, or fire, or whatever they might chance to turn to,—amid all these perverted creeds the most sublime aspirations, those approaching nearest to the sphere of truth, were the efforts of poetic genius. It was neither reason nor the lore of philosophic schools, but the creative faculty of imagination, that wrestled most strenuously with paganism. The moral wisdom of ancient heathendom was in its great poems. It was by the breath of imagination that the mist of superstition was broken; and ever and anon a portion of it floated upward, a white and sunlit cloud.

The philosophy of the most enlightened nation of antiquity went down, down, till it settled into the iron inhumanity of Stoicism and the imbruted sensuality and fiend-like scorn of the Epicurean; but in the domains of imagination the light and warmth of truth were never wholly quenched. On that sublime occasion when an inspired apostle struck a blow at the superstitions of Greece (St. Paul at Athens), his spirit stirring within him,—for he “saw the city wholly given to idolatry,”—he was encountered by philosophers; and thus was the scornful question:—“What will this babblers say?” “And when he preached the resurrection of the dead, they mocked.” Now, when the pride of pagan philosophy was thus arrayed in enmity against Christianity, I beg you to reflect upon the fact that enough of truth had been preserved in pagan *poetry* to enable that same apostolic tongue to mingle the familiar words of the Greek poets with the lessons of the gospel.

So is it in all ages. What is indeed poetry is subservient to truth and to man’s moral growth. Our complex nature—the mysterious mingling of the spiritual and the material—baffles philosophy; and, reviewing the annals of knowledge and looking only to its human sources, a deeper insight into the nature of the soul has been gained by poetry than by countless theories from the exploded dogmas of antiquity, even to the latest metaphysical scheme devised by the materialism or mysticism of our own times. The light of revelation shut out, this earthly life is a long and darksome cavern; and when in imagination I behold the human race threading their way through it, I see the mighty poets, at distant intervals, the only torch-bearers in the vast procession, holding on high a light to reach the rock-ribbed roof. What is it but their truth that has perpetuated their *poems* better than all the litera-



ture of remote times, and brought down in safety the Homeric poems from an age so ancient that history has never reached it? What fact could I mention more impressive than the existence of those poems,—at first dependent on the mere memory of an affectionate admiration, and then on the perishable records in ancient use, and yet preserved probably more than three thousand years? Their moral wisdom has won the blessing of length of days. When our thoughts seek other acquaintance than what the Bible gives with ages long ago, they travel back to Homer. Of all the literature other than what was recorded by direct inspiration he is revered as the father. In the fine lines of a living poet, little known,—

“Far from all measured space, yet clear and plain  
As sun at noon, ‘a mighty orb of song’  
Illumes extremest heaven. Beyond the throng  
Of lesser stars, that rise, and wax, and wane,—  
The transient rulers of the fickle main,—  
One stedfast light gleams through the dark and long  
And narrowing aisle of memory. How strong!  
How fortified with all the numerous train  
Of human truths! Great poet of thy kind  
Wert thou, whose verse, capacious as the sea,  
And various as the voices of the wind,  
Swell’d with the gladness of the battle’s glee,  
And yet could glorify infirmity,  
When Priam wept, or shame-struck Helen pined.”

If we seek to judge of poetry by recorded instances of its influence, there might be cited the classical event commemorated by Milton,—the fierceness of Spartan and Macedonian warfare checked by verse, when

“The great Emathian conqueror bid spare  
The house of Pindarus, when tower and temple  
Went to the ground; and the repeated air  
Of sad Electra’s poet had the power  
To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.”

Or in modern history might be suggested that beautiful incident in the life of the conqueror of Canada, when, on the eve of the victory upon the “Heights of Abraham,” Wolfe expressed a willingness to exchange the anticipated glory of his conquest for the fame of Gray’s Elegy. But, in arguing from historically-recorded instances of poetical influences, let me refer to cases of wider operation. It is stated by Bishop Burnet, in the “History of his Own Times,” that when James II. was in very unsteady possession of the English throne, a ballad was

made—treating the Papists, and chiefly the Irish, in a very ridiculous manner, and with a burden, said to be Irish words—that made an impression on the king's army that cannot be imagined by those who saw it not. The whole army—and, at last, the people, both in city and country—were singing it perpetually; and “perhaps,” he adds, “never had so slight a thing so great an effect.” Again, if a song helped to bring about the Revolution of 1688, and to drive the Stuarts from their dynasty, another song, harmonizing with another mood of the people's heart,—the sentiment of ancient loyalty,—was near bringing the exiled family back again. In the rebellion of 1745, when the young Pretender made his victorious march upon Edinburgh to set his banished foot on the threshold of the palace of his forefathers, the lineage of Scotland's ancient kings was welcomed to its own again; and every breeze that blew over Scotland—highland and lowland, the streets of the metropolis and the blasted heath of distant moors—brought with it the burden of the cavalier-song chanted by loyal Scotsmen to the music of the Highland Clans:—

“ Then, Fear, avaunt ! upon the hill  
My hope shall cast her anchor still,  
Until I see some peaceful dove  
Bring back the branch I dearly love.  
Then will I wait, till the waters abate,  
Which now disturb my troubled brain,  
Else never rejoice till I hear the voice  
That the king enjoys his own again.”

In proof of the enduring influence of what is addressed to the imagination, far higher authority may be adduced. In the sacred history of the chosen race of Israel, when the promised land was almost reached, and the inspired lawgiver and leader was to relinquish his great charge, the command of the Deity came to him, bidding him write a *song* to be taught to the children of Israel, to be put into their mouths, that it might be a witness against them in after-ages. When the Divine Providence designed to imprint upon the memory of the nation what should endure generation after generation, he inspired his servant to speak, not in the stern language of reason and law, but in the impassioned strains of imagination. *The last tones* of that voice which had roused his countrymen from slavery and sensuality in Egypt, and cheered and threatened and rebuked them during their wanderings, which had announced the statutes of Jehovah, had proclaimed victory to the obedient, and pronounced judgment on the rebellious,—the last tones, which were to go on sounding and sounding into distant ages,—were the tones of

poetry. The last inspiration which came down from God into the heart of Moses burst forth in that sublime ode which was his death-song. And why was this? "It shall come to pass," are the words of Scripture, "when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their children." Well may we conceive how, in after-times, when Israel was driven by the hand of Midian into caves and dens,—when, smitten by the Philistines, the Ark of God was snatched from them,—when, after Jerusalem had known its highest glory, the sword of the King of the Chaldees smote their young men in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor maiden, old man nor him that stooped for age,—or when the dark-browed Israelite was wandering in Nineveh or Babylon, an exile and a slave,—how must there have risen on his heart the memory of that song, with its sublime image of God's protection: "*As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did bear them; and there was no strange God with him:*" or its other mighty appeal to the imagination in the threat,—"*I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me.*"

When any one is disposed to undervalue poetry, it should be remembered that the one volume of divine prediction addressed to all mankind is the most poetical on which the eye has ever rested. It is the proudest attribute of imagination that, when the wisdom of God came down to earth to speak to man through inspired lips, it was addressed eminently to this faculty of the mind; and it is worth a thousand arguments in defence of poetry,—the simple fact, whether explained or no, that inspired patriotism and prayer and praise and thanksgiving took the voice of *song*, and that prophecy, and even the Redeemer's lessons, are glowing with the fervour of the visionary power.

It not unfrequently happens that, the dignity of poetry and its value admitted, the subject is dismissed with the thought that what is called a *taste* for poetry is not within the power of the will to attain. The degree in which it may be acquired will indeed vary with the proportion of imagination possessed by each reader; but it is wholly erroneous to suppose that accurate taste in poetry or any of the kindred arts is other than an acquired talent. It is an acquisition by reflection and continued intercourse with the best models; it is the result of intellectual and moral *activity*; and the notion that it is a natural gift—an instinct, as it were—is the conclusion of ignorance or the fallacious plea of mental

sluggishness. The fallacy has been philosophically traced to its source by a writer whose language will best serve to present the truth to you :—

“*Taste* is a word which has been forced to extend its services far beyond the point to which philosophy would have confined them. It is a metaphor taken from a *passive* sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are in their essence *not passive*,—to intellectual *acts* and *operations*. As nations decline in productive and creative power, they value themselves upon a presumed refinement of judging. The word ‘taste’ has been stretched to the sense which it bears in modern Europe by habits of self-conceit, inducing that inversion in the order of things whereby a passive faculty is made paramount among the faculties conversant with the Fine Arts. Proportion and congruity, the requisite knowledge being supposed, are subjects upon which taste may be trusted. It is competent to this office ; for, in its intercourse with these, the mind is *passive*, and it is affected painfully or pleasantly as by an instinct. But the profound and exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination, or, in ordinary language, the pathetic and sublime, are neither of them, accurately speaking, objects of a faculty which could never, without a sinking in the spirit of nations, have been designated by the metaphor *Taste*. And why ? Because, without the exertion of a coöperating *power* in the mind of the reader, there can be no adequate sympathy with either of these emotions : without this auxiliary impulse, elevated or profound passion cannot exist.”

That which is so inadequately called a *taste* for poetry is the knowledge of the abiding principles in human nature on which the art rests and the feelings which recognise their truth. It is the high office of philosophic criticism to minister to it. In the unripe and undisciplined period of taste, vicious productions will win its favour ; and only with the chastened and invigorated spirit will there be congeniality with chaste and elevated models. The value of such taste is enhanced at every period of its improvement, until at length it brings that deep emotion of delight familiar to a cultivated imagination,—a rich dowry of intellectual and moral happiness. The passionate sensibility which is an element of poetic character may, indeed, increase the pains as well as the pleasures of the spirit ; but another element is philosophic faith, whose happy attendants are love and hope. The dark periods are momentary because uncongenial ; and the main portion of a true poet’s existence—I speak in reference to his spiritual life—is happy above the lot of mere worldly intellects. When a late poet exclaims,—

“ Most men  
Are cradled into poetry by wrong :  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song,”

it was the expression of a passing morbid sentiment. So it was but a chance and discordant mood that was meant in that noble stanza of Wordsworth :—

“ I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy,—  
The sleepless soul that perish'd in his pride,—  
Of him who walk'd in glory and in joy,  
Following his plough along the mountain-side.  
By our own spirits are we deified :  
We poets in our youth begin in gladness ;  
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.”

I shall have occasion hereafter to treat of the disordered intellect and melancholy of Cowper ; of the insanity of Collins ; of Chatterton's fearful frenzy, calmed only by the cup of poison ; of the sad part of Burns's career ; and to show that none of them had their origin in the gift of imagination. But in the pages of biography I know of nothing more sublime and illustrative of the soul-sustaining power of poetry than the hermit old age of Milton. The happy visions of his youth were followed by a tempestuous life, in which one storm of disappointment after another burst upon his devoted head. As a patriot, a Christian, a husband, and perhaps as a father, his best hopes were frustrated. In the arena of political life, and in the sacred recess of home, his heart was as hopeless as his sightless eyes, but happiness communed with him in the

“ Unpolluted temple of his mind.”

He went away from an age that was unworthy of him,—not to complain, not to repine, not to stain his spirit with bitterness, but to build

“ Immortal lays,  
Though doom'd to tread in solitary ways,  
Darkness before and danger's voice behind  
Yet not alone, nor helpless to repel  
Sad thoughts ; for from above the starry sphere  
Come secrets, whisper'd nightly to his ear ;  
And the pure spirit of celestial light  
Shines through his soul, ‘ that he may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.’ ”

The same spiritual visitant irradiated the gifted but darkly-discased existence of Coleridge ; for from his very heart there came the gratitude of that wise acknowledgment :—“ Poetry has been to me its own ex-



ceeding great reward. It has soothed my afflictions; it has multiplied and refined my enjoyments; it has endeared solitude; and it has given me the habit of wishing to discover the good and beautiful in all that meets and surrounds me." Let me also bring the calm but earnest testimony of a living writer, eminent in another department of letters, whose life, devoted to laborious research, has produced three great historical works, each sufficient to give him fame. It is in the latest of these that Mr. Hallam remarks, "They who have known what it is, when afar from books, in solitude, or in travelling, or in the intervals of worldly cares, to feed on poetical recollections, to murmur over the beautiful lines whose cadence has long delighted the ear, to recall the sentiments and images which retain by association the charm which early years once gave them,—they will feel the inestimable value of committing to the memory, in the prime of its power, what it will easily receive and indelibly retain. And I know not, indeed, whether an education that deals much with poetry—such as is still in use in England—has any more solid argument among many in its favour than that it lays the foundation of intellectual pleasures at the extreme of life."

It is mental inactivity that is so fatal to all just criticism and to the genial appreciation of poetry. No one who takes up poetry as a mere matter of elegant amusement or an indolent recreation need expect to look higher than the most subordinate departments of the art. A great poem is the production of all the noblest faculties of the human mind; and what but the rash presumption of ignorance can suppose that such works are to be approached except by strenuous thought, by reverential study, and by deep meditation. In this lies the immeasurable space between poems and what are usually termed works of fiction. The common run of novels and romances are read with scarce any intellectual coöperation on the part of the reader, the gratification for the most part consisting in mere relief from vacuity of mind. The difference is as wide, too, in the enjoyment derived from the two great classes of works of imagination. That from the novel is fugitive, it being praise to say of a novel that it can be read with pleasure a second time, and a more frequent recurrence being a rare tribute to its merits. Applying the same test to poetry, the indisposition, on the part of any one competent to judge, to peruse a poem a second time is almost equivalent to its condemnation. The higher works of the art comprehend a fund of intellectual interest inexhaustible. Nine out of ten novels, when read, are flung aside for ever; while at each study of a great poem the imagination expands with the perception of new beauties and new powers. With each expansion of the imagination effected by reflection and



familiarity with the classic models a deeper insight is gained into the glories of the spirit of a great poet. In the volume of the great dramatist, for instance, there are depths innumerable that have not yet been fathomed, and which remain to be sounded by an imaginative philosophy.

In bringing this lecture to a close, let me revert to a reflection previously presented:—that a prime purpose of every one who thoughtfully seeks to develop the faculties with which he is gifted should be to give to those faculties their *due proportionate* cultivation. Life is made up of an almost infinite variety of demands on the human character,—the thousand minute incidents of daily occurrence, the weightier trusts from which no one can isolate himself, and those responsibilities which, beginning here, will have their event beyond all time. A great error of human existence is devotion to one set of duties at the expense of others,—the partial formation of character, the culture of some faculties, and the wilful or thoughtless abandonment of others.

Let them be all present in a just subordination, without prostrating the other intellectual powers. I have endeavoured to assert the majesty of the imagination, thus claiming only

“That the *king* may enjoy his own.”

The world is swayed by two principles antagonistic when divorced,—the spirit of contemplation, hermit-like seeking a retreat, and, what is more in the ascendant, the spirit of action, hurrying into the thoroughfares of society, and restless, wretched, and helpless in any chance moment of reluctant solitude. The temptation to which the mere man of letters is exposed is the disposition to withdraw from the active life in which, in common with his fellow-men, his lot is cast, into the cloister of his ideal world. I have had occasion to speak earnestly on the importance of literary cultivation; but I desire a condemnation equally earnest of the exaggeration of that importance at the cost of other duties, that pedantry which leads into the exclusive and narrow-spirited error of making literature the standard by which all things are to be measured. There is, bearing on this subject, a beautiful incident in the biography of Sir Walter Scott, to whom a young friend chanced to make a remark conveying the impression of a suspicion of poets and novelists being accustomed to look at life and the world only as the materials for art. A soft and pensive shade came over Scott's face as he said, “I fear you have some very young ideas in your head. Are you not too apt to measure things by some reference to literature,—to disbelieve that anybody can be worth much care who has no knowledge of that sort of thing,—a taste for it? God help us! what a poor world this would be if that

were the true doctrine! I have read books enough, and observed and conversed with enough of eminent and splendidly-cultivated minds too, in my time; but, I assure you, I have heard higher sentiments from the lips of poor *uneducated* men and women, when exerting the spirit of severe yet gentle heroism under difficulties and afflictions, or speaking their simple thoughts as to circumstances in the lot of friends and neighbours, than I ever yet met with out of the pages of the Bible. We shall never learn to feel and respect our real calling and destiny unless we have taught ourselves to consider everything as moonshine compared with the education of the heart."

The most accomplished condition of humanity is that in which habits of contemplation and of action exist in harmony. The noblest eulogy was pronounced on the celebrated Sir Philip Sydney, by his philosophic friend and biographer, when he said of him, "He was the exact image of quiet and action, happily united in him, and seldom well divided in any." The equal cultivation of each spiritual gift that is bestowed on us is that true idea of education set forth by Lord Bacon in a passage full of a wise imagination, closing his enumeration of the obstacles to the advancement of learning, and which in conclusion I desire to quote:—

"The greatest error is the mistaking or misplacing the last or furthest end of knowledge; for men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite, sometimes to entertain their minds with variety and delight, sometimes for ornament and reputation, and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction, and most times for lucre and profession, and seldom sincerely to give a true account of their gift of reason, to the benefit and use of men; as if there were sought in knowledge a couch whereupon to rest a searching and restless spirit, or a terrace for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect, or a tower of state for a proud mind to raise itself upon, or a fort or commanding ground for strife and contention, or a shop for profit or sale, and not a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate."

## LECTURE III.

### Chaucer.

THE DAWN OF ENGLISH POESY—DIFFICULTIES OF DESCRIBING IT—OBSOLETE LANGUAGE—CHAUCER THE FATHER OF ENGLISH POETRY—LATIN POETRY—REVIVAL OF LEARNING—ENGLISH LANGUAGE—ITS TRANSITION—STATUTES OF EDWARD THE THIRD—GOWER—AGE OF CHIVALRY—INVASION OF FRANCE—CRESSY AND POITIERS—THE BLACK PRINCE—THE CHURCH—WICLIF—CHAUCER'S BIRTH, A.D. 1328—FRIENDSHIP WITH GOWER—TASTE FOR NATURAL SCENERY—THE FLOWER AND THE LEAF—BURNS'S DAISY—ROMAUNT OF THE ROSE—CANTERBURY TALES—ITS OUTLINE—HIS RESPECT FOR THE FEMALE SEX—CHAUCER'S INFLUENCE ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE—"THE WELL OF ENGLISH UNDEFILED"—HIS VERSIFICATION—HIS DEATH, A. D. 1400.

THE era of English poetry may be described as a period of about five hundred years. At the remote point of time forming the distant boundary of those five centuries stands a name illustrious enough to justify the usage of placing it at the head of the English poets when they are considered chronologically. A great living poet closes the catalogue.\* It is a consideration of some interest that the calendar which opens so nobly with the name of Chaucer closes worthily in our day with that of Wordsworth. It is a gratification to the literary student to know that, when he seeks acquaintance with the earliest English poets, he will encounter, not the feeble and dull productions of rudeness and mediocrity, but works belonging to the higher order of the art; and also that, when he brings down the study to the literature of the present time, he will not have occasion to mourn over the degeneracy of modern inspiration. Upon each frontier of those five hundred years stands the landmark of high poetic genius. It is also worthy of remark that the history of English poetry is contemporaneous with that of the language. Almost as soon as the language spoken in England assumed a form which has continued intelligible to later generations, there appeared a poet of the first rank, who made it the voice of his inspiration. In the primitive age of English literature there is one (and but one) name of distinguished eminence. If, therefore, our subject is to be treated with regard to historical considerations, there cannot be a moment's hesitation as to the period when it is to be taken up.

\* In 1841, Wordsworth was living.

The arrangement of this course of lectures is attended, in this particular, with a disadvantage to which it is proper to advert, though I am not aware that it can be avoided except by the sacrifice of more important considerations. The portion of literature in which any reader is naturally first interested is that which is accessible in the fresh and familiar forms of contemporaneous language; and it is only as the taste is invigorated and the knowledge of former ages increased that he carries his reading into earlier literature, no longer displeased or dismayed by antiquated or obsolete dialects. This is properly the course of every student in his individual investigations as he follows the guidance of his own taste. His course is against the stream of time. To obey the same instinct in presenting the subject to your consideration would have enabled me better to conciliate your attention than, I fear, I can hope to do in treating the old English poetry. The advantage of beginning the course with modern poetry and passing by a retrograde movement into its previous eras was not to be relinquished without reflection; but, at the same time, such a method would have involved an abandonment of the advantages arising from giving to the subject somewhat of an historical form. I have therefore concluded rather to encounter the risk and inconveniences alluded to, in order to trace the march of the English Muse, and, collaterally, the rise and progress of the English language.

I shall not therefore struggle against the tide of time, though in moving with it, and setting out at a period when the language was in many respects not the English language now spoken, we must hold converse with extinct dialects,—words and forms of expression which have yielded to the same power of death which long ago conquered the lips that uttered them. It is a weary thing, no doubt, communing with our native language through the medium of dictionaries and glossaries, to meet, as it were, the curse of Babel upon our own hearth. It is painful to hear the dear voice of our mother tongue like the voice of a stranger and an alieu. The relation in which Chaucer stands to succeeding poets is that of an ancestor to a long lineage of descendants. “The line of English poets,” says Mr. Southey, “begins with him, as that of English kings with William the Conqueror; and, if the change introduced by him was not so great, his title is better. Kings there were before the Conquest, and of great and glorious memory too. \_ But the poets before Chaucer are like the heroes before Agamemnon: even of those whose works have escaped oblivion the names of most have perished.” “*The Father of English Poetry*,” “*The Morning Star*,” are the metaphorical phrases so tritely associated with Chaucer’s name as



to show the general sentiment respecting him. It could scarcely have happened that this kind of rank would have been assigned to an author of secondary merit. But it should be distinctly understood that his fame rests not only upon the fact of his being the acknowledged father of English poetry, but as one of our greatest poets.

Before entering on the question of his merits, it is proper to examine his position relatively to the literature of Europe generally and then to the language of England. The fourteenth century,—the period from the year 1300 to 1400,—it will be remembered, was the first century of the rising literature of Europe. The Latin language, which had long since ceased to be a living, colloquial language, had not fallen into the entire obsolescence of a dead language; for it continued to be the medium of communication for the learned community of all Europe. But in the time just alluded to—the latter Middle Ages—the vernacular tongues in the respective countries were beginning to assume a distinctive form, and thus to furnish to the author an instrument by which he could not only move the monastic intellect of the scholar, but arouse the neglected faculties of all to whom his writings could be made accessible in times when printing had not yet superseded the toilsome and limited labours of the copyist. In the history of modern European literature the foremost great name is that of Dante, and in immediate succession is that of Petrarch. These were men of the fourteenth century; and I have alluded to them for the purpose of showing that the little island we trace our history from was not far behind old Italy in the intellectual career. When poetic genius, after its slumber of more than a thousand years, began to breathe again beneath the genial atmosphere of the South, the strain was quickly caught by the cold nations of the North, and the inspiration of the Muse found a fit tone in words which before were known only as the rude and uncouth dialect of barbarism. Between the death of Dante and the birth of Chaucer there was an interval of a very few years. With the second great poet, Petrarch, the life of Chaucer was contemporary. All belonging to the fourteenth century, it will be perceived that the rise of English poetry was coincident with the early era of the modern literature of Europe. The ancestral position of Chaucer in the annals of our poetry makes it important to fix in the mind a distinct idea of the period of time in which he flourished. This may readily be done by the recollection that he died, at an advanced age, in the year 1400,—the border-year of two centuries. He was an author during the last half of the fourteenth century.

Fixing the date of Chaucer's time, let us next briefly examine the condition of the language of his nation. For the information of those



whose attention has not been drawn to the subject, it may be proper to state that the English language is a composite language, the chief elements being the Saxon and the Norman. It is extremely difficult—perhaps impossible—to say when the English language had its beginning, because the transformation from the Anglo-Saxon was a series of slow and gradual changes. What was the nature of those changes would be an inquiry leading me away from the present subject, and too important to be disposed of cursorily. The Norman or French dialect was a great tributary to the main current of Saxon words, and the two streams which long flowed in separate channels were at length flowing together. The earliest specimens of English writing, as distinguished from the more ancient Anglo-Saxon, belong to the latter part of the thirteenth century, not long before the year 1300; but they show a rude and imperfect condition of language. The process of formation was still going on; and it was not till the time of Chaucer that the language was saturated with the infusion of French it was capable of receiving. It must be borne in mind that changes in *written* language would not be concurrent with changes in *spoken* language. For some two or three centuries the French language was spoken by the higher classes of society in England, until it was gradually superseded by the new dialect, in which the language of the Norman conquerors was combined with the native speech of the Saxons. In all that was written the change came on more slowly:—the statutes of the realm,—the pleas in courts of justice,—the proceedings of various tribunals,—epistolary correspondence, even of a private nature,—were for a time in Latin, and afterward, and still longer, in French. Now, after the elements of the English language had, by means of colloquial use, begun to acquire a consistency and a form, it had yet to acquire a *literary* existence. And how was this to be gained? In the reign of Edward III., it was enacted by Parliament that all pleas in the courts of justice should be pleaded and adjudged in English instead of French; and yet, a hundred years after, we are told that the provision was only partially enforced. If legislation was too feeble to control the form in which judicial and technical thought was to be clothed, nothing could be expected from it in modifying or changing the mould of literature. No; it was not for the decree of legislation or philosophy to work out this revolution,—to raise the colloquial dialect, the familiar forms of speech, to the dignity of the learned idiom in which men pronounced the thoughts they desired to perpetuate in writing,—to give honour to the vulgar English,—to set the vernacular speech (long literally the dialect of slaves) as high as the clerkly Latin and the royal, aristocratic French

of the Norman nobility. The change was to be wrought by the magic influence of the poet. The poet, addressing himself to the heart of the people, needs the people's own speech. So it is in all languages; their hidden powers are first disclosed by the poets; for their theme is the knowledge which should be open unto all. Telling, in measured strains, of the passions and the feelings common to humanity, they lay aside the learned dialect, secret to all but the initiated, and reveal the unknown powers of common speech, and, at the same time, refine and improve it. The literary existence of all languages has its date, therefore, with their early poetry. The poet who contributed to this influence in a larger degree than any other was, unquestionably, Geoffrey Chaucer. He did not, however, stand alone; and the measure of his genius may be taken not only by a positive standard, but by comparison with his contemporaries, among whom stands Gower, the second in point of merit of the poets of the age of Edward III. The reign of that ambitious and warlike prince was signalized not less by the glory of foreign conquests in his wars for the crown of France than by the intellectual activity and the outbreak of imagination which distinguished its literature. I shall have occasion hereafter to show that, as in this first era of English poetry, each brilliant period that followed was also distinguished for its national importance in a political point of view. It may perhaps impress the consideration to allude to these in anticipation. After the age of Edward III., the next great literary era was the age of Queen Elizabeth, then of the Commonwealth, then of Queen Anne, and then the late period in which England was again, as in the first period, summoning all its energies in the strife with France. As far as I may be justified in drawing a general principle from the induction, it would seem that an exalted state of national feeling was the atmosphere best fitted to sustain the poetic spirit. During the period I am treating of, the enthusiasm of the English people had been wrought to its highest pitch: they had aimed to achieve the vast ambition of their king to seize the diadem of France; and never did the pulse of the nation beat higher than when victory perched upon their banners on the plains of Cressy and of Poitiers. The manners and habits of the Middle Ages were still untouched by the changes which afterward distinguished that period of European history from more modern times. The spirit of chivalry was in its vigour, giving life to institutions and customs which have now long been obsolete and extinct. The fifty years during which Edward occupied the throne make the most brilliant half-century in the annals of England. The strong arm of the king had shaken the monarchy of France to its centre; and when that

hand began to stiffen with age, the sword was wielded by his illustrious son,—the bright pattern to the nobles who formed his court and emulated the character portrayed in the lines of Shakspeare:—

“ In war was never lion raged so fierce,  
 In peace was never gentle lamb more mild,  
 Than was that young and princely gentleman.  
 When he frowned, it was against the French,  
 And not against his friends: his noble hand  
 Did win what he did spend, and spent not that  
 Which his triumphant father’s hand had won.”

It would not be easy to point to any period when the adventurous spirit of the people was more elevated by national enthusiasm. That remarkable writer whose wit could touch without profaning a serious subject, the church-historian, Fuller, said of the long-continued war in France, “that it made the English nation exceeding proud and exceeding poor.” But the chivalry of England, stimulated by the victories of Cressy and Poitiers, rested not content with those laurels. Following the banner of their prince, they penetrated into the monarchy of Castile; and, doubtless, when the war-worn soldier came home again, he brought with him legends gathered from Iberian and Moorish romances to mingle with the popular literature of his own country.

The times of Chaucer were a stirring period in the annals of the *Church*. The first great Reformer was his contemporary. It is not necessary, even were it appropriate, for me to say more on this point than that it was then that the voice of Wiclif was raised against Papal domination. The slumbering sentiments of ecclesiastical disaffection were widely agitated. The veil between the oracle of God and the hearts of the people was torn away; for the Bible was brought from the sepulchres of a dead language and made a living English book. Not only was there the agitation of war and religious controversy, but there was, moreover, civil convulsion,—the first struggle of an oppressed peasantry nerved with the hope of freedom, when sixty thousand SERFS, bursting their vassalage, were for a brief season masters of the metropolis. I allude to these subjects very cursorily; but the student of literature must reflect on the leading characteristics of each literary epoch,—of no one more than this of the early English poetry. It is thus that we learn the influences which modify and often control the poet’s inspirations, and which fashion the nation’s heart to which those inspirations are addressed.

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in the year 1328, at London. He was a man of gentle birth. His education befitted his birth, and his lot was

east in noble and kingly company. His long life was spent not in monastic or clerkly seclusion, but in the busy public life of two animated reigns. The royal favour of Edward III. and Richard II. was bestowed on him; and official records perpetuate the fact of his appointment to several stations, the precise nature of which cannot well be ascertained after the lapse of ages, with the exception of the one in which he was associated in an embassy to the court of France, charged with the important and delicate diplomacy of negotiating a marriage between the young Prince of Wales and a daughter of the French monarch,—probably to confirm that peace which had for a time closed the long war between the two kingdoms. There is a biography of Chaucer, written by the novelist Godwin, which fills four well-sized octavo volumes; and yet the authentic facts of his life may be stated in less than that number of pages. Very little is known of him, and that little has less connection with his literary character. It would, in truth, be a strange thing if memorials had been preserved of any man of letters, no matter how worthy, who lived in the early ages of a nation's literature. That kind of merit was yet but imperfectly appreciated; and, besides, let it be remembered that Chaucer flourished before the invention of printing, and his labours were therefore only known by the more limited and uncertain process of manuscript. A few isolated particulars, chance-recorded, are all that can be reasonably looked for touching the lives of the early English poets. There is often a disposition to lay hold of these few incidents, and from them, by means of conjecture, sometimes plausible, sometimes preposterous, and always fantastic, to spin out a theory of the unknown life. Of the few authentic events of Chaucer's life I have stated all I mean to state,—all that appears to be of interest. As subserving the purposes of criticism, I can attach little value to the fact of his having, during one period of his life, held an office connected with the collection of customs in the port of London, with an injunction in the patent of his office:—"That the said Geoffrey write with his own hands his rolls touching the said office, and continually reside there, and do and execute all things pertaining to said office in his own proper person and not by a substitute;" for, whatever conclusion one might arrive at, whether that such an office with such a condition of tenure was adverse to the freedom of song, or whether it was favourable, or, as is most probable, inoperative for either good or evil, the opinion would be no more than empty hypothesis. It is, however, of interest to know that Chaucer was not only a scholar, but a gentleman and a courtier; not because of any narrow considerations of courtly patronage, but because his intercourse with the world was eal-



culated to give his poetry a more enlarged character than commonly prevailed. The literature of the Middle Ages was cast in scholastic moulds. The favourite form of imaginative composition was allegory, varied only by classical story or romances devoted to the celebration of supernatural heroes and their monstrous dangers and exploits. In all this there was a weary repetition of commonplaces, and, in a word, a want of the life of poetry. What seemed therefore needed to give the first great impulse to English poetry was the appearance of some one not only endowed with poetic genius, and an intellect cultivated with the best scholarship of the age, but also adding to the love of books familiarity with the human heart, gained by intercourse with men in the arena of actual life. Hence it is that I have attached importance to Chaucer's courtly and public career. He brought the English Muse from cloistered seclusion forth into the light of open day, and, no longer enveloping her in the veil of antiquity, he displayed her in the native freshness of her youth. In these respects the contrast between Chaucer and his most eminent contemporary, the poet Gower, is strongly marked. The chief production of Gower, bearing the Latin title *Confessio Amantis*, is a voluminous didactic poem, composed of the extinct mythology of ancient paganism quaintly intermingled with narratives from the Hebrew Scriptures and the legends of Greek and Roman story,—the adventures of Jupiter and Hercules, of Gideon and Job, of Medea and Lueretia. It consequently bears, apart from its language, the stamp of no particular time or country, and might as appropriately have belonged to any other century as to its own.

But not so with Chaucer, whose poetry, while true to nature, and therefore to all ages and climes, shows the impress of England and the fourteenth century. With his bodily vision, and with that spiritual eyesight,—the imagination,—he looked upon the world in which he lived and on the men in whose thronged company he moved; and hence

“ Old England's fathers live in Chaucer's lay  
As if they ne'er had died. He group'd and drew  
Their likeness with a spirit of life so gay  
That still they live and breathe, in fancy's view,  
Fresh beings fraught with time's imperishable hue.”

One great proof of the genius of Chaucer and his superiority over his contemporaries is to be traced in this:—that he gave to his poetry a deeper and stronger sympathy with man's actual life. Not content with the conventional topics of the poetry of the Middle Ages, he followed the guidance of his own inspirations and found nature. When we find him portraying his countrymen such as he saw them in the



streets of London, and mingling these vivid but homely descriptions with loftier and more romantic themes, we trace the bent as well as the vigour of his genius, disdaining to confine the freedom of its movement to the beaten track of his metrical predecessors.

It is proof of the native energy of Chaucer's genius that, not content with transmitted inspiration, he sought the elements of poetry in its primal sources. It was much, in an age when the poets were apt to fill their urns chiefly from the classical aqueducts of antiquity, that one should seek the limpid fountain as it burst from the native rock or rose noiselessly in the bosom of the green earth. There are, scattered through the poems of Chaucer, allusions to traits of his own character and personal habits. The autobiographical passages in the writings of eminent men are those which are always seized on with avidity; and in the case of our ancient poet they are singularly complete. Apart, however, from these direct descriptions, there would be no difficulty in fashioning our imaginings of his personal character. He was a student, a man of books,—manuscript books, let it be remembered; for the art of printing came slowly on near a hundred years later. The habitual downcast tendency of his looks was a trait perpetuated in his portrait, and at once an effect and a sign of literary application and of the reflective cast of his mind. Conscious of this habit, he puts a pleasant allusion to it into the mouth of one of his imaginary companions:—

“ ‘What man art thou,’ quoth he,  
 ‘That lookest as if thou wouldest find a hare?  
 For ever on the ground I see thee stare.’ ”

But, while Chaucer knew well, as we learn from his own words, the student's aching brow and sight dimmed by poring on the written page, he loved, too, with as deep a love, the fairer and more glorious book of nature. Largely did he share that element of all great poetic genius,—a passion for the outward world, that which is commonly called nature,—a passion springing from a consciousness of its influence on the spiritual part of our being. He was endowed with too capacious an intellect not to know that the soul of man is fitted to the external world, and that its education comes not from books alone. The undying soul which animates each human being was breathed by the Creator into a material body,—a union as mysterious as death which separates it; and who, without impeachment of divine Wisdom, can question that agencies innumerable, felt by the physical frame, are transmitted to the spirit in its secret dwelling? It is not the providence of God to bestow such impulses in vain:—the bright colours and the fresh airs of spring, the

sere and death-foretelling hues of autumn, the dirge-like tones of the voice of winter, are meant to reach, beyond the senses, to the spirit which is within. If there were times when Chaucer, with a student's intensity, hung over pages on which the wisdom of other days was recorded, there were also times when his heart beat high with the fervid enthusiasm which glows with the love of nature, partaking the emotion uttered by a later poet:—

“ One impulse from a vernal wood  
Shall teach you more of man—  
Of moral evil and of good—  
Than all the sages can.”

The poetry of Chaucer abounds with passages of great beauty and—what is essential to all—true descriptive poetry, manifesting the freshness and truth of actual observation, shown not so much in mere precision of detail as in the animation which is sure to be wanting in all secondary description. Perhaps I can cite few passages more free from obsolete phraseology than the brilliant lines containing one of his descriptions of morning:—

“ The busy lark, the messenger of day,  
Saluteth in her song the morning grey :  
And fiery Phœbus riseth up so bright,  
That all the orient laugheth at the sight,  
And with his streames drieth in the greves  
The silver droppes hanging on the leves.”

It would be harsh criticism to object to the sun being designated by the old mythological title; for it is only very recent poets that have learned to lay aside that fashion of speech. This fault—excusable in an early writer—should not disparage a description which fairly sparkles with the dew of morning.

In Chaucer's love of nature there is one element of it, as a poetic feeling, in which may be traced affinity between the earliest and the latest of the great English poets. I refer to his imaginative moralizing over even the humblest flowers that deck the bosom of his native ground,—not an incongruous combination of botany and poetry, such as the language of flowers and such fantastic devices. I am speaking of that which has a truer aim,—one development of poetry's chief philosophy, in making things visible types and shadows of things invisible. It is an utterance of imagination often scorned by intellectual pride, but precious, as any one may feel who will reflect that a few Bible-words have made the lowly, untailing lilies dear to the whole Christian world. Chaucer's poem of the “ Flower and the Leaf ” is

full of this gentle morality, and is as beautiful an allegorical pastoral as the language has produced. It was a tribute to that modest flower, the daisy. Afterwards the flower, honoured by the early bards, enjoyed no more than, now and then, some chance notice, like the one tender word for it from the lips of the crazed Ophelia. And so its neglect lasted till, about fifty years ago, on the bleak side of a Scottish hill, a sturdy ploughman checked his plough ; for in the mid-path of the furrow there was looking up to him the “wee,” modest, crimson-tipped flower of a mountain-daisy. Within the manly bosom of that ploughman was beating the heart of ROBERT BURNS ; and, though the flower was soon crushed beneath the ploughshare, it had beamed long enough on a poet's eye to inspire the most touching strain that had been breathed ever since the days of old Chaucer :—

“ Cold blew the bitter biting north  
 Upon thy early, humble birth ;  
 Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth  
     Amid the storm,  
 Scarce rear'd above the parent earth  
     Thy tender form.

“ The flaunting flowers our gardens yield  
 High sheltering woods and wa's maun shield ;  
 But thou, beneath the random bield  
     Of clod or stane,  
 Adorns the histie stibble-field,  
     Unseen, alane.”

The flower and its fate called up, to Burns's fancy, associations of maiden innocence abused and ruin's plough-share driving over the short-lived happiness of suffering merit ; but this article of the poetic creed, neglected for five centuries, has been reënnounced more strongly by a later voice :—

“ Thanks to the human heart by which we live,—  
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,—  
 To me the nearest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

The deepest response to Chaucer's imaginative and thoughtful love of nature's humblest forms comes from the latest of his great successors, who has thus taken up a strain that had been hushed for near five hundred years,—a strain of gratitude as well as of poetry to the modest flower, as the origin of various spiritual emotions :—

“ A hundred times, by rock or bower,  
 Ere thus I have lain couch'd an hour,  
 Have I derived from thee, sweet flower,  
     Some apprehension,

Some shady love, some brief delight,  
 Some memory that had taken flight,  
 Some chime of fancy, wrong or right,  
 Or stray invention.

“ If stately passions in me burn,  
 And one chance look to thee should turn,  
 I drink out of an humbler urn  
     A lowlier pleasure :—  
 The homely sympathy that heeds  
 The common life our nature breeds,—  
 A wisdom fitted to the needs  
     Of hearts at leisure.

“ And all day long I number yet,  
 All seasons through, another debt,  
 Which I, wherever thou art met,  
     To thee am owing :  
 An instinct call it,—a blind sense,—  
 A happy, genial influence,  
 Coming one knows not how, nor whence,  
     Nor whither going.

“ Child of the year, that round dost run  
 Thy pleasant course,—when day’s begun  
 As ready to salute the sun  
     As lark or leveret,—  
 Thy long-lost praise thou shalt regain,  
 Nor be less dear to future men  
 Than in old time ;—thou not in vain  
     Art nature’s favourite.”

I have noticed the independence of Chaucer’s genius in seeking the native sources of poetic inspiration ; but, in doing so, I should give a false idea of his productions, if I left the impression that they were chiefly of his own invention. He was a voluminous poet ; so much so that the press of his country has as yet furnished no worthy edition of his entire works. During the greater part of his life his literary efforts were devoted to translating and paraphrasing the poets of France and Italy and of ancient Rome. Of these works the most elaborate was the “*Romaunt of the Rose*,” a version of the French allegorical and romantic poem with that title, and the poem of “*Troilus and Cressida*,” principally imitated from Boccaccio, but with large additions. Dealing with a language of which the vocabulary was yet unsettled and the metres not reduced to system, Chaucer was thus gradually invigorating his genius for the chief work on which his fame rests. It is a remark of Mr. Ellis, in his excellent “*Specimens of the Early English Poets*,” that it may be doubted whether he thought himself sufficiently qualified to undertake an original

composition till he was sixty years of age, at which time it is conjectured he began to execute the plan of his "*Canterbury Tales*." The arrangement of the poem bearing this title into one harmonious series was a conception that would do credit to any period of literature. If suggested, as is probable, by the "*Decameron*" of Boccaccio,—where a company is represented as having retired to a place of safety from the raging of a pestilence, and amusing themselves with tales of mirth,—it is free, as has been observed by Mr. Coleridge, from all reproach of unfeelingness to which the plan of the Italian author exposes his narrators.

Chaucer's plan was to present a collection of narrative poems, enlivened by a variety both of subject and of tone, comprehending the range of tragic and comic invention. A usage of the Middle Ages, still prevalent in the poet's day, afforded an appropriate mode of executing the idea. The work opens with an allusion to the season of the year when the mild temperature of spring tempted people from all quarters of England to journey on pilgrimages to the shrine of the sainted martyr at Canterbury. The poet, bent on the same pious errand, finds himself a lodger at the Sign of the Tabard, in Southwark, in company with the promiscuous gathering of pilgrims of various occupations and spheres of life as well as both sexes.

The prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* is an elaborate description of this company, and, beyond all question, gives the modern reader a more complete notion of the manners and customs of the fourteenth century than could by any research be gathered from historical records. The state of society, the way of life, the social habits of our ancestors, five hundred years ago, are vividly presented, with various details, the memory of which must have perished had it not been perpetuated by the conservative magic of the poet. The prologue is a complete poem in itself, not presenting indeed proofs of Chaucer's highest powers, but abounding in strokes of the happiest discrimination of character, and wonderfully graphic as a delineation of life with all its actual varieties. It places the author, too, as not only one of the earliest, but one of the most successful of English satirists. The satire most genial to the gentle spirit of Chaucer is that in which the serious is blended with the playful. He was a kindly-tempered humourist, better pleased to touch with a tender hand the weaknesses of men than to task their follies and their crimes. There is in his chiding more of the placid smile of Horace than the fierce indignation of Juvenal. The various portraits in the prologue owe their effect in a high degree to the delicacy of the satirist's strokes. We see the shipman, sunburnt and managing his steed



with a sailor's usual style; the prioress, with the precision of a nun, finding herself in a somewhat mixed and secular society, and with her amiable affectation of both in the pronunciation of her French and the fashions at the table, and yet withal a natural placidity shining through her assumed stateliness. In the descriptions of the sergeant-at-law and the doctor of physic, Chaucer's skill in bringing out a characteristic trait in a very few words is especially conspicuous. Of the lawyer, it is said,—

“Discreet he was, and of great reverence;  
He seeméd such, his wordes were so wise.”

With a memory stored with judicial decisions and the statutes of the realm, he is portrayed as the busiest of mortals; and then it is added, with that quiet humour which is for ever jetting out of Chaucer's pages,—

“And yet he seeméd busier than he was.”

The doctor of physic is described as deep-versed in surgery, and in the natural magic and astrology which made so large a part of the medical practice of the Middle Ages :—

“Anon he gave to the sick men his (help);  
Full ready had he his apothecaries,  
To send him drugges and his lettuaries.  
For, eche of them made oþer for to winne,  
Their friëndship was not newé to beginne.”

The satire stops not with this allusion to the doctor and apothecary playing into each other's hands; for, after an imposing list of his medical authorities, one expressive line informs us that

“His study was but little on the *Bible* ;”

a reproach on the medical profession, the justice of which I shall not assume to discuss. Sufficient is it for my purpose, in commenting on Chaucer's powers of satire, to remark that it is a reproach at one time so current that it called forth a vindication in that curious treatise, the *Religio Medici* of Sir Thomas Brown. The same subject, with a suggestion of the cause, is also alluded to by one of the dramatic poets of a subsequent age ;—

“I have heard,—how true  
I know not,—most physicians, as they grow  
Greater in skill, grow less in their religion,—  
Attributing so much to natural causes  
That they have little faith in that they cannot  
Deliver reason for.”

The most exquisitely-drawn character—most pleasing in its simplicity and grace—is that of the clergyman. I can quote no better specimen of Chaucer's descriptive style, prefacing it with a remark which may give additional interest to the passage,—that it has been conjectured that the poet had the original of the portrait in his friend, the pious rector of Lutterworth, the first of the great Reformers, John Wiclif. It has also been supposed that Dryden applied his imitation of the passage to the pious Bishop Ken; and one of the commentators suggests that Goldsmith cast his eye on Chaucer's engaging description, and accordingly transferred a trait or two of the clerical character in its brighter view to the preacher in his "Deserted Village."

"A good man there was of religioun,  
That was a poore parson of the town;  
But rich he was of holy thought and work;  
He was also a learned man, a clerk,  
That Christé's gospel truly wouldé preach;  
His parishens devoutly would he teach:

\* \* \* \* \*

Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,  
And in adversity full patient.  
Wide was his parish and houses far asunder,  
But he ne left nought for no rain nor thunder,  
In sickness and in mischief, to visit  
The farthest in his parish.

\* \* \* \* \*

He sette not his benefice to hire,  
And left his sheep, accumbred in the mire,  
And ran into London, unto Saint Paule's,  
To seeken him a chantry for souls,  
Or with a brotherhood to be withhold,  
But dwelt at home and kepte well his fold;  
So that the wolf ne made it not miscarry.  
He was a shepherd, and no mercenary;  
And, tho' he holy were, and virtuous,  
He was to sinful men not dispitous;  
Ne of his speeché dangerous, ne digne,  
But in his teaching discreet and benign.  
To drawn folke to heaven with fairness,  
By good ensample, was his business.  
But, if were any person obstinate,  
What so he were of high or low estate,  
Him would he snibben sharply for the nonés:  
A better priest I trow that nowhere none is."

Among the pilgrims going to Canterbury, and thus chance-collected at the inn at Southwark, it is agreed, at the suggestion of their host,

that, for mutual amusement, each one shall tell at least one tale in going and another on their return from Canterbury. This is the fable of the poem, in the execution of which it was contemplated by the author to connect the narratives by appropriate introductions and by episodes prompted by the incidents of the pilgrimage. It would carry me beyond my limits to enter upon anything like a critical analysis of this series of twenty-three narrative poems, which are finely introduced by the "Knight's Tale,"—the tragic story of Palamon and Arcite. The framework of the tales is, in most, if not in every instance, borrowed from older poets, especially those of Italy; but this was a process which, as with Shakspeare, still left ample scope for originality. The mention of the great dramatic poet reminds me of another important resemblance between the constitution of his mind and Chaucer's. I mean that possession, in equal congeniality, of tragic and comic powers, which is one of the signs of the highest order of human genius. The most intelligent editor of the "Canterbury Tales," Mr. Tyrwhitt, has noticed, as a great difference, that in the serious pieces Chaucer often follows the author he borrows from with the servility of a mere translator; whereas, in the comic, he is generally satisfied with borrowing a slight hint of his subject, which he varies, enlarges, and embellishes at pleasure, and gives the whole the air and colour of an original,—a sign that his genius rather led him to compositions of the latter kind. It appears to me, however, that the admirable pathos which is so often to be met with on his pages may well impair somewhat the confidence of this opinion; and I cannot but feel that it is difficult, if not impossible, to pronounce whether the natural bent of his genius was to tragedy or comedy. Whichever opinion may be adopted, it would, indeed, be a wrong, because a partial judgment; for there is an order of imaginations, to which Chaucer's belongs, which is comprehensive of the whole range of human emotions, having at command alike both tears and smiles. How vain, for instance, and how shallow, would be the criticism which would seek to decide whether the characteristic power of the mind which created Hamlet and which created Falstaff was either tragic or comic, instead of a larger energy inclusive of them both! It is indeed true that there pervades the writings of Chaucer a hearty and manly cheerfulness, so easy and unaffected that it suggests the thought rather of a joyous temperament than the meditative cast of mind for which he was distinguished. It is impossible to read his poetry without being impressed with a sense of his deep insight into human nature, and, besides that, his strong and well-disciplined judgment and good, plain, practical common sense. And here let me take occasion to say that I hold that

habit of plain philosophy—the power of looking at things aright—to be a trait of true genius. In the course of these lectures I shall be able—I know that I shall be able—to show you that the freaks and caprices of the intellect, perverse notions, and morbid, distempered feelings belong to the *secondary* order of mind, and that it is a miserable fallacy which ascribes them to genius of the first rank. I shall have occasion to deal with the productions of spirits as glorious as any that have adorned the annals of the human mind, and from them prove that the reproach of the wrong head or the wrong heart is falsely cast upon true genius. The good sense I have spoken of as a trait of Chaucer's character is finely exhibited in the course of the tale told by the Oxford Student,—the story of the patient Grisilda,—that pattern of woman's endurance,—a wife chosen from humble life by a noble husband, who is led by a strange fancy to subject her patience to trials the severest his ingenuity could devise to wound a wife's and a mother's heart. The poet gives the narrative as if his own patience could ill brook the heartless trifling with the heroine:—

“ He had assayéd her enough before,  
And found her ever good. What needeth it  
Her for to tempt, and always more and more ?  
Though some men praise it for a subtle wit  
(But, as for me, I say that evil it fit)  
T' assay a wife when that there is no need,  
And putten her in anguish and in drede.”

An officer is sent to tear her child from the mother's arms and to take it away to death. After the silence of her first amazement,—

“ But at last to speaken she began,  
And meekly she to the sergeant pray'd,  
So as he was a worthy gentleman,  
That she might kiss her child ere that it died.  
And in her lap this little child she laid,  
With full sad face, and 'gan the child to bless,  
And thus she said, in her benigne voice,—  
' Farewell, my child ; I shall thee never see ;  
But, since I have thee marked with the cross,  
Of the thilké Father blessed mayest thou be,  
That for us died upon a cross of trece.  
Thy soulé, little child, I him betake ;  
For this night shalt thou dien for my sake.’”

The tone of Chaucer toward woman is the thoughtful deference of a Christian gentleman, or, to use a term perhaps more appropriate to the age in which he flourished, a Christian knight,—a spirit as remote on

the one hand from flippant contempt as on the other from vapid and sentimental adoration. In the tale I have just quoted from, he adds,—

“Men speak of Job, and most for his humbles ;  
 As clerkes, when them list, can well indite  
 Namely of men, but as in sothfastnesse.  
 Though clerkes praisen women but a lite,  
 There can no man in humbles him acquite  
 As woman can, ne can be half so true  
 As woman be.”

The writings of Chaucer have an interest in connection with ecclesiastical history ; for, abounding as they do in keen and earnest satire of clerical and monastic abuses, they have truly been reckoned among the means by which popular sentiment was animated and prepared for the great change of the Reformation. The celebrated John Fox, the martyrologist, expressed surprise that they were suffered to elude ecclesiastical censorship, whose severity was spent on many less influential productions. Not to such abuses was the satire of Chaucer confuted ; and it is a proof of the vigour of his mind that in one of the “*Canterbury Tales*,” apparently prompted by a sudden indignation, he has turned the light of his genius upon the grand delusion of the Middle Ages,—the search for the philosopher’s stone. The tale is a curious and elaborate representation of the sleights of alchemy, written no doubt for the purpose of rescuing the simple-minded from falling victims to vain hopes of their own and the artful impositions of others. It is conceived in a most vivid detestation of the folly and falsehood ; and, with other manifestations of the same spirit, shows how largely this old poet shared that one prime element of a poet’s heart,—the love of truth.

There is an important question as to the influence of Chaucer’s poems on the English language. On this point, opinions the most opposite have been sustained. On the one hand, by an early etymologist he has been condemned as its chief corrupter ; as having brought into the language, in the strong phrase of the writer, “cart-loads of Norman words,”—a reproach which has been repeated by many later authors ; on the other hand, it is to this same Chaucer was applied the phrase so often quoted in ignorance alike of its authorship and of its application,—“the well of English undefiled.” This tribute to his illustrious predecessor in verse was from the poet Spenser. The full examination of this subject would involve details not suited to the occasion. The Saxon and Norman languages, or, to describe them by other names, the English and French, were not then



two distinctly-separated streams. They were beating together in stormy agitation, and no one could either control the tide or foresee its future course. It was Chaucer's fate to float upon those waves. "If," says the poet's most intelligent editor, "we could suppose that the English idiom in the age of Chaucer remained pure and unmixed as it was spoken in the court of Alfred or Egbert, and that the French was still a foreign, or at least a separate language, is it credible that a poet, writing in English on the most familiar subjects, would stuff his compositions with French words and phrases which must have been unintelligible to the greatest part of his readers? Or, if he had been so very absurd, is it conceivable that he should have immediately become not only the most admired but also the most popular writer of his times and country?" It was Chaucer's misfortune to have only an unformed—an unripe—language; but, to prove that his influence on that language was powerful and happy, it is enough to observe the strength of thought, the variety of feeling, the delicate shades of meaning, of which he made the language expressive. It is no proof of Chaucer's having corrupted a pure dialect that the language of his poems has become obsolete, and that, too, not recently; for an English historian, writing two hundred years ago, remarks that an Englishman needs an interpreter to understand Chaucer's English. It is also well as wittily observed by the same writer—the church-historian, Fuller—that, if the poet left the English tongue so bad, how much worse did he find it! and, accordingly, he gives him the praise of having refined and illuminated it. It is the opinion also of a very competent judge in our own day, it being remarked by Southey that in no other country has any writer effected so much with a half-formed language. Retaining what was popular, and rejecting what was barbarous, he at once refined and enriched it. The language which has not reached a firm consistency is doomed to grow obsolete; and a poet of the seventeenth century—Waller—thus deplores the wrong done by the hand of Time to the early poets:—

" We write in sand ; our language grows,  
And like the tide our work o'erflows.  
Chaucer his sense can only boast,—  
The glory of his numbers lost ;  
Years have defaced his matchless strain :  
And yet he did not sing in vain."

A literary question has also been made respecting the character of Chaucer's versification; and it may be considered an undecided discussion, with high authority on each side, whether his verse is rhythmical,

to be read by cadence, admitting a considerable variety in the number of syllables in each line, or metrical,—that is, with fixed metres and limited to ten or eleven syllables. This question is one too much of technical prosody to be more than alluded to. But, as has been well remarked by one of the disputants, “be it as it may, it is no slight proof of Chaucer’s sagacity that he should have pitched the key and determined the length of verse which, after so many experiments and the lapse of nearly five centuries, have been found to accord best with the genius of language, and that his ‘riding rhyme,’ under the more dignified denomination of the ‘heroic couplet,’ should be the measure which Dryden and Pope and their followers have preferred to all others for grave and lofty subjects.”

The extended plan of the poem of the *Canterbury Tales*, as stated in the prologue, was never accomplished; and it stands the mighty fragment of the genius of the first of the great English poets,—one surpassed in the versatility of his powers only by the unapproachable genius of Shakspeare. The plan was wonderfully elaborate, and wonderfully achieved, too, when we consider that it was entered on by the poet at the advanced age of threescore. Life was too short for the vast speculations of the poet’s imagination; for not only does the proposed series of the tales remain unaccomplished, but it will be remembered that it is over the imperfect fragment of one of them that Milton laments in that fine passage of “*Il Penseroso*,” where he craves the power to call up the lost poets from oblivion:—

“O sad virgin, that thy power  
Might raise Musæus from his bower,  
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing  
Such notes as, warbled to the string,  
Drew iron tears down Pluto’s cheek,  
And made hell grant what love did seek!  
Oh, call on him that left half told  
The story of Cambuscan bold;  
Of Camball and of Algarsife,  
And who had Canacé to wife,  
That own’d the virtuous ring and glass;  
And of the wondrous horse of brass  
On which the Tartar king did ride.”

That Chaucer did not achieve all that his genius meditated was a misfortune; but the truth must not be withheld, that there rests on his memory the reproach of having in some of his productions stained his inspirations with the grossness of his times. That it was the grossness of an age still rude and unrefined is the extenuation. It is a plea which

may well be uttered in apology for one, the general tendency of whose poetry is indisputably moral. The blemishes which disfigure it are of that kind which may disgust, but which can scarcely contaminate. His gentle spirit had its season of contrition for his poems which "sounen unto Sin," and for which he prayed forgiveness. In the hour of death the thought of their popularity was agony to him: he is said to have exclaimed,—“Woe is me that I cannot recall and annul these things! but, alas, they are continued from man to man, and I cannot do what I desire.” The lofty aspiration of the verses considered his last composition—the voice from the anguish of a dying bed—may plead for the oblivion of the imperfection of some of his writings:—

“The wrestling of the world asketh a fall:  
Here is no home; here is but wilderness.  
Forth, pilgrim! forth, O beast, out of thy stall!  
Look up on high, and thank thy God of all.”

Chaucer died in the year 1400, leaving the countless generations who repeat the English tongue a body of poetry which, if destined in the lapse of time to be wrapped in the dust of an antiquated dialect, was destined also to contribute to the development of the genius of some of the mightiest of his successors. His tomb was in the city of his birth, in that consecrated receptacle of the dead where, in honour of him,—the father of English poetry,—have since been gathered, in the Poets' Corner of the Abbey, the remains and the monuments of the family of the bards of England. “He lies buried,” says Fuller, “in the south aisle of St. Peter's, Westminster, and since hath got the company of Spenser and Drayton,—a pair royal of poets, enough almost to make passengers' feet move metrically who go over the place where so much poetical dust is interred.”

## LECTURE IV.

### Spenser and the Minstrelsy.

RELAPSE IN ENGLISH POETRY AFTER CHAUCER FROM 1400 TO 1553—ITS CAUSES—THE WARS OF THE ROSES—ECCLESIASTICAL DISTURBANCE—THE REFORMATION AND QUEEN ELIZABETH—WYATT AND SURREY—THE SONNET—BLANK VERSE—SACKVILLE—ELIZABETH'S REIGN AND CHARACTER—CLASSICAL LEARNING—THE BRITISH CHURCH—SPENSER'S BIRTH, IN A. D. 1553—THE SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR—ITS ALLEGORY—THE FRIENDSHIP OF SYDNEY—SPENSER'S RESIDENCE IN IRELAND—THE FAIRY QUEEN, IN 1590—SIR WALTER RALEIGH—THE GREAT WORK OF SPENSER—MILTON'S PRAISE—SPENSER'S MIGHTY IMAGINATION—APPEAL TO HUMAN SYMPATHIES—CHIVALRIC SPIRIT—RELIGIOUS AIM—MR. HALLAM'S CRITICISM—HYMN TO BEAUTY—THE SPENSERIAN STANZA—ALLITERATION—HIS BLEMISHES—THE EPITHALAMIUM—DEATH, A. D. 1598—THE BRITISH MINSTRELSY AND BALLADS—KINMONT WILLIE—SIR PATRICK SPENS—ARMSTRONG'S GOOD-NIGHT.

I FEEL great reluctance to occupy one moment of your time with words of apology ; for, while no one can be better aware than I am how often these lectures will stand in need of it, I trust it is the dictate of a truer modesty which prompts me to set them before you simply without pretension and without apology. There is, however, an embarrassment I cannot escape, which I therefore wish to mention in one or two words : I mean the perplexity between a desire to do all the justice I can to each subject as it rises up in its abundance to my mind, and, on the other hand, the anxiety not to trespass too largely on your patience,—a point on which I am the more solicitous because of the very kind attention that thus far has been extended to me. The subject allotted to this evening transcends reasonable bounds, at the risk of impairing unity of impression.

It is somewhat unfortunate for the complete propriety of the metaphor by which Chaucer is so often designated, that the "*morning star*" of English poetry was not followed by the light of day. The genius of the first of our English poets shone, indeed, like the last of the starry host newly risen above the outline of some dark mountain, but not, like it, to mingle its beams with the light of the coming dawn. That early outbreak of imagination was not followed by the flood of light which flows in with the perfect day, which was still far distant.

One of the most remarkable of these relapses in intellectual advancement is the long interval between the death of Chaucer, in the year 1400, and the birth of the next of England's great poets, Edmund

Spenser, in 1553. This period of more than a century and a half is comparatively a desolate tract; and, parting with Chaucer in the era of the Middle Ages, we gain companionship with no other master-spirit until within the domain of modern times. With a beauty of illustration which does not often adorn the pages of Warton's "History of English Poetry," he happily compares the appearance of Chaucer in the language to a premature day in spring, after which the gloom of winter returns, and the buds and blossoms which have been called forth by a transient sunshine are nipped by frosts and scattered by storms.

For this blank in the annals of the English Muse there must have been causes,—some, it may be, beyond the sight of philosophy; for it seems to me that the vast spiritual ocean of the human mind has its tides, not like the daily currents which are swayed by the near influences of the moon, but with an ebb and flood enduring for some unknown term of ages, and ruled by God's hidden providence over the destinies of mankind. Without, therefore, venturing to penetrate into regions where speculation should humbly veil its eyes, there still are causes which may be assigned for the interruption of English literature during the fifteenth century:—seven reigns of disputed legitimacy, thirty years of civil slaughter, which first brutalized and then crushed the nation's heart, so that to this day the hues which the Creator's hand has given to the rose seem stained with blood. The period succeeding the wars of the Houses of York and Lancaster was not such as to give the needed repose to the nation's spirit, wretchedly wasted by its long agony. The reign of the second of the Tudors,—

"That majestic lord  
Who brake the bonds of Rome,"—

was a time of ecclesiastical revolution, calmed, indeed, during the few short years of that saintly youth,—

"King, child, and seraph, blended in the mien  
Of pious Edward."

But the nation, crushed by the dominion of one woman, was soon to rise to its highest elevation under the sway of another. It is not my theme to discuss the character of Queen Elizabeth, to weigh her power of sovereignty with her feminine or unfeminine frailties, presenting her in one light as described by the poet Gray,—with "lion port and awe-commanding face," or in another, or, it may be, only a different shade of the same light,—the inimitable virago, according to the free and more familiar description of Sir Walter Scott. Enough for the present subject is it that the forty-four years during which she held the sceptre



is the most glorious of the English reigns, whether the sources of that glory are to be traced to the sovereign herself, or to the wisdom of the counsellors or the courage of the soldiers by whom her throne was encircled.

In speaking of the literary interreign between Chaucer and Spenser for the purpose of a general impression, I should give a very erroneous view were I to leave you to suppose that during that period of more than a century and a half the voice of the English Muse was hushed. It did not, indeed, produce works belonging, like the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Fairy Queen*, to the highest order of poems; but there flourished those who well deserve notice before entering on the more glorious Elizabethan era.

It is usual to mark the early part of the sixteenth century as an epoch in the history of English poetry, and justly so when we consider the improvement it received from two poets who lived during the reign of Henry VIII., and whose names are scarce separable, from early and long association. They were men of aristocratic rank,—Sir Thomas Wyatt, the lover of Anne Boleyn, and Henry Howard, the ill-fated Earl of Surrey, the latter especially being esteemed one of the chief reformers of English verse. Acquaintance with the more refined poetry of Italy, acquired either by direct personal intercourse or by study, introduced important changes into that of England. Harsh, pedantic, and unpoetical fashions of speech, an ambitious style which betrayed itself as early as the time of Chaucer, and became more prevalent afterwards, were thrown aside. The language was made at once more graceful and more simple, and Italian forms of verse introduced. The sonnet was for the first time naturalized into English poetry, to prove, as I shall show hereafter, congenial with its spirit and fitted to be the vehicle of a vast variety of thoughts and emotions. The metres of English verse were more strictly disciplined; so that the merit has been claimed for Surrey of having been the first to lay aside the early rhythmical form for the more regular metrical construction. There is, moreover, due to him, beyond all question, the fame of having given the first example of *blank verse*,—that form which has proved so eminently and peculiarly adapted to the language that it has been well said to deserve the name of the *English metre*,—a construction, as we shall familiarly see in the series of these lectures, so rich and varied in its music: for it will sound to us in the mighty drama of Shakspeare, in the epic language of the *Paradise Lost*, in the more humble strains of *The Task*, and the utterance of the high philosophy of *The Excursion*.

It is worthy of notice that Surrey brought to the cause of letters an

influence important in that period,—the influence arising from dignity of rank and honourable public services. He was noble by birth and by character, a courtier and a soldier; but his bright career had a destiny of blood. There is nothing in the annals of English history of which we acquire an earlier and more vivid impression than the domestic tyranny of the Eighth Henry,—to a child's fancy the British Blue-Beard of its story-book,—driving from him his wives, the mothers of his children, and devoting more than one fair neck, once lovingly embraced, to the bloody handling of the executioner. What reign in the range of history so execrable? And let me help your hearts to a still more fervid hatred by reminding you what was almost the last act of it. Henry Howard had been in childhood an inmate of the palace,—the playmate of the monarch's child; and when he grew into manhood, he was a loyal and honoured courtier and a gallant and trusted soldier. But it was Surrey's fate, and his only crime, to bear the name of Howard,—a name which had newly become odious to the despot's ear. He was committed as a traitor to the Tower; and in the very same week in which death was slowly travelling through the unwieldy bulk of the bloated tyrant, the young poet, the gallant Surrey, at the age of twenty-seven, laid down his head to meet a traitor's death upon the scaffold.

Another copartnership in poetry, closer than that of Surrey and Wyatt, and suggesting very different associations, is to be briefly noticed in the succeeding reign of Edward VI., when was produced the first metrical version in English of the Psalms of David, by two writers whose names have become the symbols of dulness and wretched versification,—Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins. It would assuredly be a bold attempt to vindicate from its long-continued reproach the poetical character of these two good men. They were indeed for the most part but sorry versifiers, in whose hands the sublimity—or, to use a more adequate term, the omnipotence—of the original Hebrew psalmody was often lost in their flat and prosaic phraseology and clumsy metres. But it should be remembered that the translation of the Psalms into English metre is an enterprise that has never yet been successfully achieved, though even the name of Milton stands among those by whom it has been adventured. It is also to be remembered that honourable testimony has been borne by high authority to the exactness of the old version in its correspondence to the Hebrew text, and that its faults are redeemed by some passages of true poetic spirit, a vigour, a simplicity, and a dignity, befitting the lofty theme. The load of obloquy which rests on the memory of Sternhold and Hopkins should be lightened a little when we meet with a stanza such as this :—

“ The Lord descended from above, and bow’d the heavens most high,  
 And underneath his feet he cast the darkness of the sky:  
 On cherub and on cherubim full royally he rode,  
 And on the wings of mighty winds came flying all abroad.”

My design, however, in adverting to this metrical version is not to discuss its merits, but to remark that it served to incorporate, in how rude soever a form, into English poetry that wonderful series of songs which “Heaven’s high muse whispered to David,”—wonderful in its adaptation to the church in all ages and in all nations, to the church in victory or in woe, and to each Christian for all moods of devotion,—his season of thanksgiving and joy, his hours of peril and affliction and of contrite agony. It was this version that fitted to English lips the music of the royal inspired singer; and, as the homely verses were year after year familiarized in the people’s devotions, the matchless imagery of the Hebrew poetry was sinking into the hearts of the men of England, and inspiring that sacred character which is the glory of all the highest inspiration of English poetry.

Just at the close of the gloomy reign of Queen Mary there appeared one poetical effusion, showing a force of imagination which would have placed its author in the highest rank of our poets, had he not relinquished his inspiration for the exclusive devotion of his genius during a very long life to the political service of his country. “The Mirrour of Magistrates” was the title of a work planned by Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and intended to comprise a series of narratives of the disasters of men eminent in English history. The first of these, with the poetical preface, or “Induction,” as it is styled, was all that he contributed; but in those few hundred lines there was an inventive energy the like of which the English Muse had not before shown, and a glorious o’ershadowing of the allegorical imagination which soon after rose in the “Fairy Queen.” Sackville’s “Induction” stands as the chief—the only great—poem between the times of Chaucer and of Spenser. Allegorical poetry presents no more vivid image than in that single line of his personification of Old Age,—

“ His wither’d fist still striking at Death’s door,— ”

or the masterly personification of War :—

“ Lastly stoode Warre, in glittering arms yelad,  
 With visage grim, sterne looke, and blackly hew’d.  
 In his right hand a naked sworde he had,  
 That to the hiltes was al with blood imbrew’d;  
 And in his left (that kings and kingdomes rew’d)  
 Famine and fyer he held, and therewythall  
 He razéd townes and threwe down towers and all

"Cities he sakt, and realmes that whilom flower'd  
 In honour, glory, and rule, above the best,  
 He overwhelmede, and all theyr fame devower'd,  
 Consumed, destroy'd, wasted, and never ceast  
 Tyll he theyr wealth, their name, and all opprest.  
 His face forehew'd with woundes, and by his side  
 There hung his terge with gashes deepe and wyde.

"In mids of which depaynted there we found  
 Deadly Debate, al full of snakey heare,  
 That with a bloody fillet was ybound,  
 Outbreathing nought but discord everywhere."

What a gloomy conception was the plan of the poem,—the stories of the miseries of the great! It was congenial to the reign in which it was composed, and has been compared to a landscape on which the sun never shines. More than that might be said. There not only hung on Sackville's poetic genius a gloomy shade, but it may be thought to have taken its colour from the lurid light of the flames of religious persecution. We may picture to our fancies this thoughtful poet turning his footsteps beyond the confines of London, on a winter's day,—the dreary season described at the opening of the poem,—wandering till night-fall:—

"The darke had dimm'd the day ere I was ware."

And what was the spectacle he might have encountered? The dispersing throng, that had just gathered round the stake where flames had wrapped a martyr's body, the fire not yet extinct in the smouldering ashes; and perhaps the desolated family—the outcast wife and children—lingering on the spot where a spiritual hero had sealed his faith. It was a fit age for poetry's darkest conceptions; and readily might Sackville frame his gloomy personification of sorrow to guide him in fancy into the realms of death, and to hear from the lips of the dead the story of their woes. Under this dreary guidance, his genius entered for a brief season into the shadowy domain of imagination; but soon after he turned the powers of his mind into political service, in which he continued during the whole reign of Elizabeth and part of that of her successor, when the hand of death was suddenly laid upon the veteran statesman at the council-board of James I. It is a remarkable fact that in actual life he personally witnessed two instances of political downfall transcending any his tragic muse could have called up in his mournful poem. He was one of that judicial tribunal which pronounced the doom of Mary Stuart: it was from his lips that the unhappy queen received the message of death; and it was part of Buckhurst's stern duty to behold the last look of that royal fair one, and to witness the blow



which severed from her now wasted body the head which had once glittered with the diadems of both France and Scotland. It was also Lord Buckhurst's lot—and these were perhaps the only two calamities of his long and honourable career—to sit in judgment upon the Earl of Essex when that nobleman fell from the pinnacle of queenly favour.

Referring Lord Buckhurst's poem to the time of Queen Mary, I come now to the most illustrious period of English poetry. In using the name of Queen Elizabeth to mark a literary era, there is a propriety beyond mere chronological convenience. In the recorded inspirations of the Muse she fills so large a space, and genius poured forth such abundant streams of high-toned loyalty to her, that the student of literature must contemplate this influence over the minds of her contemporaries. It would be a small purpose for me to inquire how far the literary loyalty of the age transcended its just bounds into the extravagancies of adulation. Sufficient is the fact that such, whether in excess or not, was the predominant feeling, of which, after all her pomp and power were in the grave, there is familiar evidence in our very Bibles; for she stands recorded in the preface to our English version in the glowing phrase,—“That bright occidental star, Queen Elizabeth, of most happy memory.” It would carry me beyond my subject to treat of her character; but this I desire to say,—that the school in which this sovereign was trained was the school of adversity. History presents no finer contrasts than between those two days of her life. The first, when, a culprit, on suspicion of treason, she was brought in custody along the Thames to be committed to the Tower, and, perceiving that the barge was steering to the traitors' gate, she refused to enter that guilty portal, and, in the utter destitution of a young and helpless woman, called God to witness she was innocent. The refusal and the asseveration of innocence were unavailing; and the first intelligence that reached the prisoner announced that the scaffold had already drunk the blood of a meeker victim,—the Lady Jane Grey,—and she knew it was thirsting for hers. But the ear which is open when earthly monarchs are deaf heard her cry of innocence, and in the course of a few though weary years she was again the inmate of the ancient fortress of the metropolis. She went forth the queen of a rejoicing nation, surrounded by cohorts of her devoted nobles and multitudes of a happy people; and, before the crown was set upon her brow, lifting her eyes to heaven, she poured forth fervid thankfulness to the Almighty for his wondrous dealings,—for his wondrous mercies. “Wherever she moved,” says the record of this the first of her magnificent progresses, “it was to be greeted by the prayers, the shouts, the tender words and uplifted



hands of her people. To such as bade 'God save her Grace!' she said again, 'God save them all!' so that on either side there was nothing but gladness, nothing but prayer, nothing but comfort."

Such was the fit opening of a reign for which was reserved a glory which shall fade only with the world itself,—the glory that rose upon our race in the genius of Edmund Spenser and William Shakspeare. To the period usually comprehended in what is styled the age of Queen Elizabeth, no less than about two hundred poets are assigned by a catalogue which by high authority is thought not to exceed the true number. With reference to English literature, we speak of the age of Queen Elizabeth; but it is proper to discriminate, by noticing that there was in this particular a decided contrast between the early and late portion of the reign, and that it is only the last half to which this lustre properly belongs. It is this consideration which alone enables us to reconcile with a true estimate of the times Sir Philip Sydney's earnest complaint of the degraded condition of poetry. It was during the last twenty years of the reign that the flood of poetic light burst in: the large luminary of Spenser's genius had scarce mounted high enough above the horizon for its beams to kindle all they touched, when there arose the still more glorious shape of Shakspeare's imagination, like Milton's seraph,—“another morn risen on mid-noon.” In treating of this period of literature, the nature of these lectures will oblige me to limit my views to these two poets, the matchless types of their age, while, in doing so, I must pass in silence by not a few whose fame would have shone more brightly in a less perfect day. There was much to make the age eminently propitious to a great intellectual development. The language had gradually reached its full stature. It was not only adequate to the common wants of speech, but it was affluent in expressions which had become incorporated with it from the literature of antiquity. Classical learning in its best forms had been made, as it were, part of the modern mind of Europe; and in England, under Elizabeth, the great universities, which during the immediate previous reigns suffered from violence, which had pierced even those tranquil abodes, were gathering anew their scattered forces. The attainments of the queen herself, acquired by the superior education which Henry VIII. had the sagacity to give his daughters (and, as it is one of the few good things to be said of him, let us not pass it by), created a sympathy, one of many, between her and the people. Besides the treasures of classical literature, necessarily limited somewhat to the learned, there was scattered through the realm a literature familiar to the popular mind,—the Gothic, as distinguished from classical lore, the

early metrical romance, the ballads, and the minstrelsy in all its forms,—tales told by the fireside in the long English winter evenings, and songs sung, as Shakspeare tells us, by women, as they sat spinning and weaving in the sun. The civil and religious condition of the country furnished another impulse to its mental advancement, for it abounded with all that could cheer and animate a nation's heart. There was the repose from the agony of ecclesiastical persecution, and it mattered little what might be the foreign danger; for there was the proud sense of national independence and national power,—its moral force mightier than even its physical. The spiritual communion with Rome was broken for ever, and England was once more standing on the foundations of its ancient British church. The Thames, his tide no longer governed by the distant waves of Tiber, “glided at his own sweet will.” The language, I have remarked, was enriched by phraseology of classical origin; but it had also gained what was more precious than aught that could come from the domains of extinct paganism. The word of God had taken the form of English words, and thus a sacred glory was reflected upon the language itself. The fitness of the language for versification had been greatly developed by the refinement and multiplicity of its metres, so that the rich and varied melody of English words became audible as the ancient rudeness of early dialects was cleared away.

The life of Edmund Spenser was nearly coincident with the last half of the sixteenth century. Born in 1553, he died in 1598. The work which won for him rank among the poets was the now almost-forgotten poem entitled “The Shepherd's Calendar,”—a series of twelve eclogues adapted to the twelve months of the year. Having closed his collegiate career at Cambridge, he dwelt for about the space of two years in the north of England, perhaps in the region whence in this century has issued so noble a strain of poetry. One proof of the poetic temperament was here given in his susceptibility to the attractions of a fair one, immortalized, though unrelenting, under the fanciful name of Rosalind. The *snit*, though unsuccessful, stands recorded in as sweet a line as ever told a poet's love: he

“Woo'd the widow'd daughter of the glenne.”

The opening of Spenser's literary career strikes me as eminently characteristic of his gentle spirit; for there was all the modesty of genius, conscious of powers already proved by retired efforts and whispering to itself mightier achievements in days to come, and yet withal timid in trusting to the world's rude handling its secret communings with the Mnse. There was no precipitancy in rushing into the arena

of authorship. Not till about his twenty-seventh year was his first poem published; and then it came forth without his name, dedicated in the feigned and humble signature, "Immerito," to Sir Philip Sydney:—

"Goe, little booke; thyselfe present,  
As childe whose parent is un kent,  
To him that is the president  
Of noblesse and chivalrie;  
And if that Envie barke at thee,  
As sure it will, for succour flee  
Under the shadow of his wing."

The dread of malignant tongues or of unimaginative indifference, painfully as they seem to have presented themselves to the poet's sensitive apprehensions, was not strong enough to silence the voice of his genius, which sought utterance, as genius always speaks, alone from its own inward promptings:—

"For, pyping low in shade of lowly grove,  
I play to please myselfe, all be it ill."

He sent forth the "Calendar" not in boastful emulation of more famous productions which had preceded it, not to gain indiscriminate applause, but the esteem of the wise and good of his own day by its deferential imitation of those whom he looked up to as the masters of English song:—

"Followe them farre off, and their high steps addeore;  
The better please, the worse despise: I ask no more."

The aspirations of Spenser did not fail; he acquired not the mere favour, not the mere patronage, but that which comprehended both,—the friendship of a great and a good man,—that model of the perfect gentleman in a state of society where somewhat of the spirit of chivalry was passing away, with its forms, and giving place to the habits of more modern days,—Sir Philip Sydney.

"The Shepherd's Calendar" is a pastoral in little more than name; for, containing but few descriptive passages, either of the seasons or of natural scenery, it is in a great measure made up of allegorical allusions to the political history and religious differences of his own times,—the clergy of the Roman Catholic and Protestant communions being respectively portrayed under the transparent guise of two classes of shepherds. The reader of early English poetry will find in these eclogues two fables—"The Oak and the Bramble" and "The Kid and the Fox"—not surpassed in any period of our literature for the graceful pleasantries essential to that species of composition. It is worthy of

remark, that the phraseology of the "Calendar" is much antiquated beyond the time of its author,—so much so as to require at the date of its publication an explanatory glossary. This may be attributed partly to a desire common to poets of various ages, to give a kind of quaint dignity to their effusions by removing them from the familiarity of contemporary speech; such, for instance, as the slightly-obsolete language affected by Lord Byron in the first books of "Childe Harold." It may also be traced to the instinctive disgust with the fashionable style of the pastoral poetry in vogue throughout Europe, in which the thoughts and the expressions of courtiers and scholars were, in a language inflated, pedantic, and over-refined, put in the mouths of shepherds,—a false taste censured in one of his other poems:—

"Heapes of hughe wordes uphoorded hidiously,  
With horrid sound, though having little sense,  
They thinke to be chiefe praise of Poetry;  
And thereby, wanting due intelligence,  
Have marr'd the face of goodly Poesie  
And made a monster of their fantasie."

In shunning this error and aiming at a Doric simplicity, the author of "The Shepherd's Calendar" ran into the opposite extreme of uncouth rusticity. This poem may be regarded as experimental of the author's powers and of the capacity of his countrymen to receive him. Ten years elapsed before it was followed by the great work on which his fame rests. During this interval the genial influence of Sydney's friendship was shed on Spenser's spirit, inspiring him to loftier efforts than his unpretending pastorals. If ever poet had reason to thank God for the gift of a true friend, it was the author of the "Fairie Queen." The chief value of Sydney's friendship was in the intellectual sympathy it gave to one who seems to have borne his genius meekly on him. It also brought the royal patronage; and Spenser accompanied to Ireland the lord-lieutenant, the good Lord Gray, as his secretary, in which capacity he rendered services on which was conferred the grant of a large tract of land, taken from the forfeited estates of one of the Irish earls, subject, however, to the condition of cultivation and consequently personal obedience to the proprietor. For several years Spenser's dwelling-place was the ruined castle of Kilcolman, on the banks of the river Mulla, commemorated in his poems. The real value, to a scholar, of his three thousand Irish acres cannot easily be judged of; but when I consider that the English dominion over Ireland was at that time maintained only by dint of military occupation, the country, with all its goodly lakes and fair islands, swarming with the fierce untamable na-



tives, lawless, revengeful, and treacherous, sparing no peaceful household,—the land devastated, dwellings plundered and in flames, the churches in ruins, and religion depraved,—it seems to me that the royal bounty to the poet might not unfairly be likened to a plantation in Central Florida,—as fair a region as fiercely tenanted by the prowling bands of Indians, searee more ferocious than the native Irish whom Queen Elizabeth spent her thousands sterling to subdue. In Spenser's well-written *prose* treatise on the state of Ireland he says, "At the execution of a notable traitor I saw an old woman, which was his foster-mother, take up his head, while he was quartered, and suck up all the blood that ran thereout, saying, 'This earth was not worthy to drink it,' and therewith also steeped her face and breast and tore her hair, crying out and shrieking most terribly." When, in his immortal allegory, he describes the abode of Temperance,—“a goodly castle, plaste foreby a river, in a pleasant dale, and the bruitish rabble that beleagured it,”—

“Loe ; with outrageous ery,

A thousand villeins round about them swarm'd

Out of the rockes and eaves adjoining nye :—

Vile caitive wretches, ragged, rude, deform'd

All threatning death, all in strange manner arm'd :

Some with unwieldy elubs, some with long speares,

Some rusty knives, some staves in fier warm'd.

Sterne was their looke ; like wild amazed steares,

Staring with hollow eies and stiffe upstanding heares.”

In all this the imagination may have contented itself with the mere function of the eye looking from the ruined turrets of Kilcolman Castle. It was uncouth society and a strange abiding-place for the gentle spirit of Edmund Spenser to be consigned to ; but he has left, in the *prose* treatise just referred to, proof that he contemplated the evil plight of that ill-fated island with a manly spirit ; and we find not the petty querulousness of his personal grievances, but a patriotic zeal in the service of his sovereign and a Christian hopefulness to better the condition of his fellow-men. If the natives were savage and debased, the face of nature in the Green Isle was happy and smiling ; and happier and brighter still was the country into which the poet's imagination gained entrance, the sunny, shadowy vales, the fair lakes, with their floating islands, the delectable mountains, of *Faery Land*. Looking upon the royal bounty to Spenser as little better than virtual banishment from all he held dear in his native land, I feel sometimes inclined to regard Queen Bess as a heartless pedant, craving adulation and yet ready to remove from her English realm its brightest ornament. But Spenser had not achieved the work which has endeared him to after-times ; and,



besides, the rough-hewn purpose of those who sent him into the waste places of a turbulent province was shaped to a glorious end. Happy was it that his spirit was withdrawn from the throng—from the unpropitious atmosphere of a court—to muse on spiritual ereations of his own fancy, and amid the imaginative forms of truth which in bright and countless legions came trooping round him.

In 1590 the first books of the "Fairy Queen" were published. The poem came forth, not with the timidity of his little pastoral, without an author's name, and speeding for shelter to the wing of a benignant patron, but with the majesty of a loftier theme and a nobler inspiration. It is ushered in with a dedication bearing the uame of Edmund Spenser, and addressed to the sovereign,—“The most high, mighty, and magnificent Empress, reuowned for pietie, virtue, and all graeious government, Elizabeth, by the grace of God Queen of England, France, and Ireland, and Virginia.” There stands the name of that honoured State. There is many a reason for the lofty spirit of her sons; but it seems to me that the pulse of their pride may beat still higher at the sight of the record of “the Ancient Dominion” on the first page of the “Fairy Queen.” The poet placed it there as a tribute to her from whom the name was taken, and not less to the gallant enterprise of Raleigh and his adventurous followers. It is one of the interesting facts connected with the composition of the “Fairy Queen,” that before the poem was given to the world the course of Sir Walter Raleigh’s adventurous life brought him to the secluded dwelling of Spenser, by whom the interview has been commemorated in verse. There are few occurrences in the history of literature on which the fancy can more pleasingly dwell than the meeting of two such men. Their characters, their varied achievements,—Raleigh, fresh from his martial enterprises beyond the sea, and fitly styled, in one of Spenser’s imaginative allegorical titles, “The Shepherd of the Oceau,” at one time his sword unsheathed against the ancient monarchy of Portugal, at another planting his foot on the unbroken soil of the New World and penetrating into the amazed tenantry of untamed Indians, and now greeted by the gentle Spenser,—the poet, in the maturing of his genius, having transcended bounds more vast than the Atlantic or those which Raleigh had overleaped; for he had passed the limits of time and spae, and now came back radiant, as it were, with the glory he had caught in “Fairy Land.” They stood together beneath the poet’s roof,—the ruined castle of the ancient Irish earl; they wandered together amidst the rich foliage of the Green Island and along the banks of the river which flowed through the poet’s grounds, and, mingling for years the music of its flow with the deep

melody of his strains, has become associated with enchanted fairy streams. When we conceive the soldier, "the Shepherd of the Ocean," pouring into the poet's ear the story of his Atlantic pilgrimage, the marvels of the New World,—and, on the other hand, the poet rehearsing his wondrous imaginations, his yet unfinished song, telling its story too of a world, like America, newly discovered,—the brilliant and boundless realms of Fairy Land,—we can almost imagine these two gifted mortals, like the inhabitants of two different planets, meeting on this dim spot which men call earth, and revealing to each other the respective glories of their abodes.

The friendship of Raleigh supplied the loss of Sydney, who had met his honourable death in battle, dying without witnessing Spenser's great achievements in verse. When the poem of the "Fairy Queen" came forth, it was introduced with a magnificence characteristic of the age; for it was not only dedicated to the sovereign, but was prefaced by a series of introductory verses addressed to the most illustrious statesmen and soldiers of her court;—to Hatton, and Burleigh, and Essex; Howard, and Walsingham, and Raleigh; to Buckhurst, whose muse had slumbered since the noble effort which I have before spoken of; and not only to all these, but, with a truth and affection worthy of the poet, to the mourning sister of his lost friend, Sir Philip Sydney; and closing with an address, full of the chivalrous gallantry of his age, "to all the gracious and beautiful ladies of the court."

Having now reached the confines of Spenser's chief production, my mind pauses with somewhat of dismay at the magnitude of the theme before me. When I consider the vast plan of the poem and the multitude of passages of surpassing energy and beauty, it is impossible to escape the feeling of the inadequacy of criticism to a faithful portraiture of Spenser's genius. Were I to attempt to convey a general idea in one comprehensive sentence, it would be by saying that the "Fairy Queen" was the great emanation of the imagination of Protestant England in the sixteenth century. When Queen Elizabeth, at the opening of her reign, made her public entrance into London, a pageant was prepared in Cheapside, where Time accosted her, leading by the hand his daughter Truth, and Truth presented the monarch with the English Bible, upon which was written "*Verbum Veritatis*." That fanciful ceremony was a type of the state of popular thought and feeling which in its highest mood, as exalted by imagination, produced the great allegorical poem under consideration. The taste for allegorical poetry had for a long time been predominant. It entered largely into the imagination of Chaucer and his contemporaries, and

more recently into Sackville's "*Induction*." It seems to me to have closed with Spenser, passing away—as is remarkable—in the full glory of the zenith. This poem shows the power of allegory in its true and most imaginative form,—not the spurious and insipid allegory of the imaginative personification of abstract qualities, but the expression of a covert sense under an apparent fable. The plan of the "*Fairy Queen*" is both elaborate and involved, and could scarce be stated without consuming more time than would be prudent to devote to it. Its general purpose, in the author's words, was "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline,"—a purpose so pure and so exalted that well might Milton say, addressing himself to the Parliament of England, "I dare be known to think our sage and serious poet Spenser a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas." Each book of the poem was intended to be allegorical of some virtue, such as holiness, temperance, chastity, friendship, justice, and courtesy, and each represented or defended by a knight, as the whole allegory was to be coloured by the genius and institutions of chivalry,—a chivalry, however, impregnated with the spirit of Christianity, and therefore more pure and spiritual than the mere earthly system that passed under the name. The primal element of a great poet's power is the knowledge of the human heart; and, wherever his imagination may roam to gather its materials from without, there must first be communion with all that dwells in the recesses of his own soul. This meditative imagination was Spenser's in an illustrious degree; and when rising from the deep of his own spirit to look abroad, there seems to have been no spot of the knowledge of the civilized world which the vision of his far-seeing imagination did not comprehend. Sacred and profane, ancient and modern, classical and romantic, history or fable or legend, all that the ingenuity of man has devised or his memory perpetuated, are gathered together; not a promiscuous and discordant mass, but fused by the heat of poetic genius and poured out in one glowing and glittering flood. And here let me take occasion to invite attention to the prime constituent of imagination,—imagination as described by Shakspeare, "*all compact*,"—the faculty of blending into one harmonious and consistent whole the various elements it calls together. On the pages of the "*Fairy Queen*" you meet, for instance, the exploded mythology of ancient paganism and the immortal mysteries of Christian faith so shadowed forth together that the sanctity of the last is yet noways sullied by profane contact; the blind cravings of benighted antiquity are so united with the light that has been shed upon the believer's heart that all is made subservient to the cause of truth. It is

superficial and unimaginative criticism which censures what it often calls the confusion of paganism and Christianity. It is a false criticism, attributable to an incapacity to sympathize with a high and strenuous effort of imagination, and from which I shall hereafter have occasion to vindicate also the poetry of Milton. To the apprehension of philosophical criticism there is no incongruity in combinations thus imaginatively presented. When, for instance, one of Spenser's heroes visits the realms of the lost spirits, whom does he behold? In one spot, Tantalus, consumed with the hunger and the thirst of centuries, and with the dread thought of centuries to come; and, not far away, another wretch plunged into the infernal waters, washing and wringing his blood-stained hands eternally, hopelessly,—the deep damnation of Pontius Pilate. It is the poorest technical criticism which halts to notice that one is brought from the fictions of paganism and the other from truths recorded in Holy Writ. This matters not. To the fervid imagination they are both realities; for they are both images of eternal woe,—the sufferings hereafter of a wicked life.

The might of Spenser's imagination was manifested not only in harmonizing the materials his erudition had accumulated from every region of learning, but in making his creations independent of all particular time or space; giving them indeed a habitation and a name, but an existence purely imaginative, in the limitless land of Fairy, above the domains of History and Geography. He places you, as was said by Coleridge, "in a dream,—a charmed sleep; and you neither wish nor have the power to inquire where you are or how you came there." Now, in this poetic process there was imminent danger,—danger of the poet's soaring so high as to break the chain of sympathy with the human heart of mortal man dwelling below upon the earth. His flight might have carried him into a region above the clouds,—into an atmosphere too subtle to sustain the life of man's frail spirit. The fatal ultraism of supernatural invention is the unnatural. The highest proof of the excellence of the "Fairy Queen" is to be found in its command over our sympathies; for this is conclusive of its fidelity, even amidst all the exuberance of fancy, to nature. The wondrous region teems with human feelings; it is full of humanity,—humanity refined and glorified. The supernatural realm which Spenser has peopled with the multitudinous creatures of his fancy seems like the earth arrayed in some spiritual illumination, as if man's dim and gross vision had been couched to behold the bright soldiers encamped around the dwellings of the just; as if to these bodily eyes of ours were revealed the hosts of our ministering angels; as if it were granted us to see the invisible visitants of the human soul,



speeding on their errands of love, or roaming with purposes of hate. When the imagination is duly kindled by this unequalled allegory, it loses not its earthly sympathies; and yet at the same time it is enchanted, like Milton's Comus beholding "a fairy vision"

"Of some gay creatures of the element  
That in the colours of the rainbow live.  
And play i' the plighted clouds."

And how is it that the poet, amid all the ethereal movements of his fancy, has ever held his foothold on the earth, going to the utmost verge of the fanciful, and never passing the bounds which separate it from the fantastic? Chiefly by the deep insight, essential to all great poetry, into human nature,—a knowledge of that living soul given by God's breath to the dust of the ground from which man was formed; a knowledge of the soul in the weakness of its fallen state; and—what gives to Spenser's muse her sacred character—a knowledge of the soul in the more hopeful condition of the redemption. Besides these, the chief and grand elements of the poet's power, he humanized his lofty allegory by making it an elaborate tale of chivalry; and this was in an age when the tilt and tournament had not become, like the Eglinton farce, an empty and frivolous pageant,—an age of martial excitement, the early modes of warfare not wholly superseded, and therefore the feats of arms and knightly adventures still in high repute. Another means by which the allegory was twined about the heart is to be traced in the frequent allusions to the poet's own country and its illustrious monarch, by which he has made his fairy creations akin, as it were, to British blood. Thus we have these elements to solve the earthly and unearthly characters of the magic poem. It is all fairy, and yet full of all that fills the human heart; it is full of patriotism; and, more than all, it is full of Christianity.

That Spenser designed the "Fairy Queen" as a profoundly moral and religious poem will be apparent to any one who studies it in a true imaginative spirit; and its sacred character has not been duly appreciated simply because the unimaginative reader recognises for devotional poetry only that in which the lesson is obtruded in its more direct shape,—a mode of instruction utterly uncongenial with Spenser's genius. The modest, shrinking delicacy of his nature recoiled from handling holy themes too palpably. The veiled teaching of truth accorded not only with this trait of his genius, but also with the illimitable powers of his imagination. To the reader of devotional poetry who expects to find the piety all spread out upon the surface, the strains of Spenser will sound like the wild stories of secular romance; but to the ear of a



cultivated imagination they come like echoes from the oracle of God. When the celebrated John Wesley—a man who in spiritual affairs exerted probably as wide an influence over his fellow-men as any man who has ever lived—gave direction for the clerical studies of his Methodist disciples, he recommended them to combine with the study of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament the reading of the “Fairy Queen.” Whether this advice was given for the copious imagery and pious sentiments, or for the abundant, fervid, and melodious diction of Spenser’s poetry, it is no weak authority; for no one knew better than Wesley how mighty an agent is the imagination in swaying the hearts and intellects of men, and the consequent importance of the cultivation of it.

The religious aim of the “Fairy Queen” is especially to be discerned in the first book, which is deemed the finest of the six, and is in itself a complete poem. The legend of the Knight of the Red Cross, or Holiness, is an allegory as perfect in the execution as in the conception. The knight represents the militant Christian arrayed in the spiritual panoply described by St. Paul. Christian Truth, or the Church, is typified in the person of the heroine, “the heavenly Una with her milk-white lamb;” and the poet of Protestant England portrayed Popery, or spiritual error, under the form of Duessa. My limits forbid my attempting any amplified comment on the poem; which I need the less regret, as it is in my power to refer you to an inimitable series of critical papers on the subject from the pen of Professor John Wilson, of Edinburgh, in reference to which that calmly-judging critic, Mr. Hallam, characterizes the author as a living writer of the most ardent and enthusiastic genius, whose eloquence is as a rush of mighty waters, and who has left it for others almost as invidious to praise in terms of less rapture as to censure what he has borne along in the stream of unhesitating eulogy. These papers have great value as pieces of imaginative and philosophical criticism, written in a spirit of such glowing admiration of Spenser that I would most earnestly recommend them as the best means of extending and reviving the study of the “Fairy Queen.” They are to be found in Blackwood’s Magazine, beginning in the year 1833.

It is the remark of this eloquent writer that no poet ever possessed a more exquisite sense of the beautiful than Spenser. This is to be traced in his descriptions of external nature, and, in a still more surpassing degree, his portraiture of female beauty. There is no poet of whose powers isolated quotation would convey a more inadequate impression than Spenser, because it seems to have been the delight of his spirit to luxuriate in its own imaginings of holiness and virtue and

beauty, and then to pour forth a long-continued strain, of which the well-sustained effect would be marred by disjointed extract. In one instance a description of a fair sylvan huntress is expanded to a hundred lines; in which, after the poet has wrought up the sense of admiration by a matchless profusion of fancy and imagery, the last touch is given to the woodland beauty in this stanza:—

“ Her yellow lockes, crispéd like golden wyre,  
About her shoulders weren loosely shed;  
And, when the winde amongst them did inspyre,  
They wavyd like a penon wyde dispred,  
And low behinde her backe were scatteréd:  
And, whether art it were, or heedlesse hap,  
As through the flowering forrest rash she fled,  
In her rude heares sweet flowres themselves did lap,  
And flourishing fresh leaves and blossoms did enwrap.”

But more exquisite far than any other, rises to our imagination the form of Una, radiant with the simple grace of heavenly truth,—beauty beaming through her sorrows as she wanders searching for the deluded Christian soldier:—

‘ Forsaken, woeful, solitary maid,  
One day, nigh wearie of the yrkesome way,  
From her unhastie beast she did alight,  
And on the grasse her dainty limbs did lay  
In secrete shadow, far from all men’s sight.  
From her fayre head her fillet she undight,  
And layd her stole aside. *Her angel’s face,  
As the great eye of heaven, shynéd bright,  
And made a sunshine in the shady place:*  
*Did never mortall eye beholde such heavenly grace.”*

The high spirituality of Spenser’s genius is in nothing more conspicuous than his power of awakening the sense of the beautiful by his imaginative pictures of what may be called spiritual beauty, as distinguished from natural beauty. He seems to delight in the possession, as it were, of a new sense,—his mind’s eye charmed with the vision of moral loveliness,—an imperishable grace, celebrated in his beautiful “Hymne in Honour of Beautie:”—

“ Beautie is not, as fond men misdecme,  
An outward shew of things that only secme.  
“ For that goodly hew of white and red  
With which the cheekes are sprinkled, shall decay;  
And those swete rosy leaves, so fairly spread  
Upon the lips, shall fade and fall away  
To that they were, ev’n to corrupted clay!

That golden wyre, those sparkling stars so bright,  
Shall turne to dust, and lose their goodly light.

“ But that faire lampe, from whose celestially ray  
That light proceedes which kindleth lovers’ fire,  
Shall never be extinguisht nor decay ;  
But, when the vital spirits doe expire,  
Unto her native planet shall retyre ;  
*For it is heavenly borne and cannot die,  
Being a parcell of the purest skie.*”

Spenser’s exquisite sense of the beautiful was, I may say of course, accompanied with as vivid a conception of the opposite images of horror and affright ; to which we owe the wonderful pictures of the “ Temple of Pride,” the “ Cave of Despair,” and the “ Den of Mammon,” demanding a strenuous effort for the reader’s imagination to keep pace with the poet’s. For instance, the abode of “ Temperance ” is assailed by a turbulent throng of “ Lusts ” and “ Passions,” led on by one thus portrayed :—

“ Which suddaine horreur and confuséd cry,  
When, as their capteine heard, in haste he yode  
The cause to weet, and fault to remedy.  
Upon a tygre swift and fierce he rode,  
That as the winde ran underneath his lode,  
Whiles his long legs nigh raught unto the ground.  
Full large he was of limbe and shoulders brode ;  
But of such subtile substance and unsound,  
*That like a ghost he seem’d whose graveclothes were unbound.*

\* \* \* \* \*

“ As pale and wan as ashes was his looke ;  
His body leane and meagre as a rake,  
And skin all wither’d like a dryéd rooke ;  
Thereto as cold and dreary as a snake,  
That seem’d to tremble evermore and quake.  
All in a canvas thin he was bedight,  
And girded with a belt of twisted brake ;  
Upon his head he wore an helmet light,  
*Made of a dead man’s skull, that seem’d a ghastly sight.*”

But I must forbear from any attempt to enter on this kind of detailed comment on the poem, which cannot be pursued without a sense of amazement at the unbounded sources of Spenser’s imagination.

The scope of these lectures has of necessity a limit in the examination of any one production of the poet’s ; but there is no finer theme for me to indulge the hope of returning to in some future course, and rendering that full homage which is due to the “ Fairy Queen.”

It is a common but very erroneous literary opinion which gives to

Pope the merit of having carried the versification of English poetry to its highest perfection. With all the refinement of his numbers, he still falls below the author of the "Fairy Queen" in the variety, the power, and the matchless melody of verse. The instrument which Spenser sounded was one of far greater compass, unequalled in the depth and sweetness of its tones. The fame too often given to Pope is the rightful property of his great predecessor, who, among other achievements in this department of his calling, gave to the poetry of his language that structure of verse which bears his name,—the *Spenserian Stanza*. He seems to have considered that there was due to his elaborate poem a peculiar and appropriate metrical fashion; that it should have a voice of its own. When you come to analyze the stanza, it is found to be one of considerable complexity; and the effect on the ear is such that if the movement seems ever embarrassed, as it were, by conflicting currents of sound, occasioned by the reduplication and the involution of the rhymes, still, it passes over these obstacles victoriously in the long Alexandrian verse which gives so magnificent a close to every stanza. The following stanza appears to me, in this respect, typical of its structure:—

"As a tall ship tossed in troublous seas,  
Whom raging winds, threatening to make the prey  
Of the rough rocks, doe diversly disease,  
Meetes two contrarie billows by the way,  
That her on either side doe sore away,  
And boast to swallow her in greedy grave,—  
She, scorning both their spights, does make wide way,  
And, with her brest breaking the foamy wave,  
Does ride on both their backs, and fain herself doth save."

The effect is also very frequently enhanced by Spenser's revival of the alliteration, which has been employed to an excess, in the very early English poetry. In his master-hand it loses its artificial and mechanical appearance, and gives often to the line a richness of sound the secret of which is not discovered till examined analytically. The Alexandrine closing of the following stanza has, it will be observed, peculiar force and beauty, resulting in part from the alliteration:—

"For, round about, the walls yelothed were  
With goodly arras of great majesty,  
Woven with golde and silke so close and nere,  
That the rich metal lurked privily,  
As faining to be hidd from envious eye;  
Yet here and there, and everywhere, unwares  
It shew'd itselfe, and shone unwillingly,  
Like to discolour'd snake, whose hidden snares  
*Through the green grass his long, bright-burnisht back declares.*"

Unable to point to a hundred of the characteristic beauties of the "Fairy Queen" which I must pass in silence, I have no disposition to spend a moment on what are considered its imperfections. One of these is thus finally disposed of by the eloquent critic whose papers on the poem have been referred to:—"Speuser's style is said to be diffuse. So is the style of a river when it chooses to become a lake. But a river never chooses to become a lake without a sufficient reason for such change of character. It keeps a look-out how the land lies, and adapts its career to circumstances all its way down from source to sea. There you see it shooting straight as an arrow; here you might mistake it for a mighty serpent uncoiling in the sun; there you almost wonder why it is mute, till you gaze again and are ashamed of yourself for having expected voice from one so still and deep; and here you see the old tops of trees swinging in the storm, but hear not the branches creak, because of the thunder of the cataract. Just so with Speuser. One hour you see him—that is, his poetry—carelessly diffused in the sunshine and enjoying the spirit of beauty, in which he lies enveloped as in a veil of dreams; another, he winds away lucidly along flowery banks, with a sweeter and yet sweeter song as he nears the bowers on the borders of paradise; now, as if subdued by a sudden shadow, his brightness grows a glimmer, and the glimmer a gloom, and, wondering what noise it is you hear, you catch a sight through the mist of white tumbling waves, and recoil in alarm from a monstrous sea."

The "Fairy Queen" exists in a fragmentary state. Of the twelve projected books but six are complete. There is, I think, little if any reason to suppose that the poem, according to the original plan of it, was ever finished. The tradition of the other books having perished is very improbable.

The conception was perhaps too vast to be achieved even by the powers of Spenser; and, whatever might have been effected with length of days, his life closed in its prime maturity. During the latter period of his existence his domestic happiness had been for a brief season greatly enlarged by a happy marriage, which inspired one of the most poetical of his occasional poems. The "Epithalamium" is thus characterized by Mr. Hallam:—"It is a strain redolent of a bridegroom's joy and of a poet's fancy. The English language seems to expand itself with a copiousness unknown before while Spenser pours forth the varied imagery of this splendid little poem. I do not know any other nuptial song, ancient or modern, of equal beauty. It is an intoxication of ecstasy, ardent, pure, and noble. But it pleased not Heaven that these day-dreams of genius and virtue should be undisturbed." Spenser



retired to his residence in Ireland with his wife,—one of the three “Elizabeths”—he has commemorated as dear to him,—his mother, his queen, and his bride. A very few short years passed over his happy home, gladdened, too, by the voices of his children. The rebellion of Tyrone broke out; Kilcolman Castle was seized and fired by the rebels, from whom Spenser, with his wife and two young children, scarce escaped. His property, and the intellectual treasures of his unfinished writings, were in a moment destroyed; but, sadder far to think of, there perished in the flames the poet’s infant child. Spenser hastened to London, and, after the lapse of a few weeks,—the inarticulate voice of his lost babe doubtless for ever sounding in his ears, the vision of its tender limbs wrapped in flames for ever burning on his fancy,—the author of the “Fairy Queen” breathed his last. He died at an inn: it has been said, heart-broken and starving;—this may be exaggeration;—but certainly heart-stricken and in need. Sydney was in the grave; Raleigh was far away upon the sea; Burleigh had no sympathy with the suffering bard; and Essex was not the quick friend he had found in others.

“Spenser,

For all the glory that thy copious song

Pour’d on the great, what did they pour on thee?”

His body was buried in Westminster Abbey, by the side of Chaucer. His pall was borne by poets; and the last honour paid to him whose genius had been so purely devoted to elevate and beautify the ideal of womanly character was paid by a woman’s affectionate reverence. A monument was erected by Anna, Countess of Dorset, with this simple inscription:—“Here lies, expecting the second coming of our Saviour Jesus, the body of Edmund Spenser, the prince of poets in his time, whose divine spirit needs no other witness than the works which he left behind him. He was born in London, in the year 1553, and died in the year 1598.”

In examining that literary period to which Spenser belongs, there is a department of poetry which it is necessary for me to allude to with much more brevity than contents me. I mean the Minstrelsy, which, having begun at a remote and unknown period of the language, is supposed to have flourished most in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and especially on the frontier between England and Scotland.

Let it be remembered that it was of one of these rude ballads that Sir Philip Sydney, immediately before the time of Spenser and Shakespeare, when more ambitious poetry failed to satisfy the longings of his imagination, said, “I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglass that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet.”

The martial state of society among the border-population seems to have fostered a minstrelsy distinguished for the vivid energy of its strains, the boldness of its descriptions, and a wild intermixture of rough humour and simple pathos, which have rarely, if ever, been caught by even the best of its imitators. The border-life was one of perpetual danger and activity. Private feuds assumed somewhat of the dignity of national war; and the frequent themes of the minstrel were acts of lawless violence or the griefs of a widowed wife and a childless mother. The ballads have been handed down from generation to generation,—for the most part treasured only on the tablets of memory; but often in these fragments there is a force and a graphic reality which stimulates the imagination to a ready apprehension of the imperfect tale. For instance, in such a lament as this:—

“ Hie upon Hielands,  
And low upon Tay,  
Bonnie George Campbell  
Rade out on a day.  
Saddled and bridled  
And gallant rade he;  
Hame cam his gude horsc,  
But never cam he !

“ Out cam his auld mither,  
Weeping fu’ sair,  
And out came his bonnie bride  
Riven her hair.  
Saddled and bridled  
And bootied rade he;  
Soon hame cam the saddle,  
But never cam he !

“ My meadow lies green  
And my corn is unshorn;  
My barn is to build  
And my babies unborn.  
Saddled and bridled  
And bootied rade he;  
Soon hame cam the saddle,  
But never cam he !”

Among the ballads collected with such affectionate zeal by Sir Walter Scott, there is one which has struck my fancy as describing the border-life with even more than the usual animation. It is entitled “Kinmont Willie,” and relates the rescue of a prisoner from Carlisle Castle by the Lord of Buccleugh:—a very gallant exploit, and, what was uncommon, effected without bloodshed.

The boldness of the Scots in thus surprising an English fortress is said to have highly incensed Queen Elizabeth, and to have endangered the peace of the two kingdoms. When Buccleugh was afterwards presented to the English sovereign, tradition tells us that, in her peremptory way, she demanded how he dared to undertake an enterprise so desperate; and the undaunted chieftain's answer was, "What is it that a man dares not do?"—a reply which so struck the queen that she exclaimed, "With ten thousand such men our brother of Scotland might shake the firmest throne of Europe."

At an advanced part of my course I shall have occasion to recur to the early minstrelsy, in showing how the revival of the study of it contributed to reanimate English poetry, and especially how, sinking into the heart of Walter Scott, it, more than any other external influence, made him what he was. How must the fire of his imagination have glowed with the restoration and perusal of this ballad, narrating, in its rude fashion, an adventure of his own clan, led on by an ancestor of his own chieftain,—the Lord of Buccleugh. I shall quote such stanzas of the ballad as will keep the train of the story:—

"Oh, have ye na' heard o' the fause Sakelde,  
 Oh, have ye na' heard o' the keen Lord Scroope?  
 How they ha'e ta'en bauld Kinmont Willie,  
 On Haribee to hang him up?

"Had Willie had but twenty men,  
 But twenty men as stout as he,  
 Fause Sakelde had never the Kinmont ta'en,  
 Wi' eight-score in his eompanie.

"They band his legs beneath the steed,  
 They tied his hands behind his back;  
 They guarded him, five some on each side,  
 And they brought him ower the Liddel-rack.

"They led him through the Liddel-rack,  
 And also through the Carlisle sands,  
 They brought him to Carlisle Castle,  
 To be at my Lord Seroope's commands.

"My hands are tied, but my tongue is free,  
 And wha will dare this deed awow?  
 Or answer by the border-law,  
 Or answer to the bauld Buccleugh?"

"Now haud thy tongue, thou rank reiver,  
 There's never a Scot shall set thee free;  
 Before ye cross my eastle-gate,  
 I trow, ye shall take farewell o' me."

“ ‘Fear na’ ye that, my lord,’ quo’ Willie ;  
 ‘By the faith o’ my body, Lord Scroope,’ he said,  
 ‘I never yet lodged in a hostelrie  
 But I paid my lawing before I gaed.’

“ Now word is gane to the bauld keeper  
 In Branksome Ha’, where that he lay,  
 That Lord Scroope has ta’en the Kinmont Willie  
 Between the hours of night and day.

“ He has ta’en the table with his hand ;  
 He garr’d the red wine spring on hie :  
 ‘Now a deep curse on my head,’ he said,  
 ‘But avengéd of Lord Scroope I’ll be !’

“ ‘Oh, is my helmet a widow’s coif ?  
 Or my lance a wand of the willow-tree ?  
 Or my arm a lady’s hilye hand,  
 That an English lord should lightly me ?’

“ ‘And have they ta’en him Kinmont Willie  
 Against the truce of border-tide,  
 And forgotten that the bauld Buccleugh  
 Is keeper here on the Scottish side ?’

“ ‘Oh, were there war between the lands,—  
 As well, I wot, as there is none,—  
 I would slight Carlisle Castell high,  
 Though it were built of marble stone

“ ‘I would set that castell in a flame,  
 And sloken it with English blood :  
 There’s never a man in Cumberland  
 Should ken where Carlisle Castell stood.

“ ‘But since nae war’s between the lands,  
 And there is peace,—and peace should be,—  
 I’ll neither harm English lad nor lass,  
 And yet Kinmont freed shall be.’

“ He has call’d him forty marchmen bauld,  
 Were kinsmen to the bauld Buccleugh.

\* \* \* \* \*

“ And as we cross’d the batable land,  
 When to the English side we held,  
 The first o’ men that we met wi’,  
 Wha should it be but fause Sakelde ?

“ ‘Where be ye gaun, ye hunters keen ?’  
 Quo’ fause Sakelde ; ‘come, tell to me.’

‘We go to hunt an English stag  
 Has trespass’d on the Scots countrie.’

“ ‘Where be ye gaun, ye marshal men ?’  
 Quo’ fause Sakelde ; ‘come, tell me true.’

' We go to catch a rank reiver  
Has broken faith wi' the bauld Buccleugh.'

" ' Where be ye gaun, ye mason lads,  
Wi' a' your ladders lang and hie ?'  
' We gang to hunt a corbie's nest  
That wons not far frae Woodhouselee.'

\* \* \* \* \*

" And when we left the Stranchaw bank,  
The wind began full loud to blaw,  
But 't was wind and weet, and fire and sleet,  
When we came beneath the castell-wa'.

" We crept on knees, and held our breath  
Till we placed the ladders against the wa',  
And sae ready was Buccleugh himself  
To mount the first before us a'.

" He has ta'en the watchman by the throat,  
He flung him down upon the lead :  
' Had there not been peace between our lands,  
Upon the other side thou hadst gaed.'

" ' Now sound our trumpets,' quo' Buccleugh :  
' Let 's waken Lord Seroope right merrilie.'  
Then loud the warden's trumpet blew :  
' Oh, wha dare meddle wi' me ?'

\* \* \* \* \*

" They thought King James and a' his men  
Had won the house wi' bow and spear :  
It was but twenty Scots and ten  
That put a thousand in sic a stear.

" Wi' coulters and wi' fore-hammers,  
We garr'd the bars bang merrilie,  
Until we came to the inner prison,  
Where Willie Kinmont he did lie.

" And when we cam to the lower prison,  
Where Willie Kinmont he did lie,—  
' Oh, sleep ye ? wake ye, Kinmont Willie,  
Upon the morn that thou 's to die.'

" ' Oh, I sleep saft, and I wake aft ;  
It's lang since sleeping was fled frae me.  
Gie my service back to my wife and bairns,  
And a' gude follows that spier for me.'

" Then Red Rowan has hente him up,  
The starkest man in Teviotdale :—  
' Abide, abide now, Red Rowan,  
Till of my Lord Seroope I take farewell.



- “ ‘Farewell, farewell, my gude Lord Seroope  
 My gude Lord Seroope, farewell!’ he cried.  
 ‘I’ll pay you for my lodging-mail  
 When first we meet on the border-side.’
- “ Then shoulder high, with shout and cry,  
 We bore him down the ladders lang;  
 At every stride Red Rowan made  
 I wot the Kinsmon’s airns played clang.
- “ ‘Oh, mony a time,’ quo’ Kinmont Willie,  
 ‘I have ridden horse baith well and wood;  
 But a rougher beast than Red Rowan,  
 I ween, my legs have ne’er bestrode.
- ‘And mony a time,’ quo’ Kinmont Willie,  
 ‘I’ve pricked a horse out ower the firs,  
 But, since the day I back’d a steed,  
 I never wore sic cumbrous spurs.’
- “ We scarce had won the Hanshaw bank,  
 When a’ the Carlisle bells were rung,  
 And a thousand men on horse and foot  
 Cam wi’ the keen Lord Seroope along.
- “ Buccleugh has turn’d to Eden Water,  
 Even where it flow’d frae bank to brim,  
 And he has plunged in wi’ a’ his band,  
 And safely swam them through the stream.
- “ He turn’d him on the other side,  
 And at Lord Seroope his glove flung he:—  
 ‘If ye like na’ my visit in merry England,  
 In fair Scotland come visit me.’
- “ All sore astonish’d stood Lord Seroope;  
 He stood as still as rock of stane;  
 He scarcely dared to trew his eyes  
 When through the water they had gane.
- “ ‘He is either himself, a (diel from below);  
 Or else his mother a witch maun be;  
 I wadna’ ha’e ridden that wean water  
 For a’ the gowd in Christentie.’ ”

As fine a specimen of the ancient minstrelsy as can be given is what Coleridge called “the grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spens.” It is one of the historical ballads, the precise occasion of which is wrapped, however, in mystery, except that it has some relation to the Scottish princess who was seated on the throne of Norway, thus occasioning an intercourse between those two countries.

It is a noble example of the unknown minstrel’s powers of description:—

- “ The king sits in Dunfermline town,  
 Drinking the blude-red wine ;  
 ‘ Oh, where will I get a skuly skipper  
 To sail this new ship of mine ? ’
- “ Oh, up and spake an eldern knight  
 Sat at the king’s right knee :—  
 ‘ Sir Patriek Spens is the best sailor  
 That ever sail’d the sea.’
- “ Our king has written a braid letter,  
 And seal’d it with his hand,  
 And sent it to Sir Patriek Spens  
 Was walking on the strand.
- “ ‘ To Norroway, to Norroway,  
 To Norroway o’er the faim ;  
 The king’s daughter of Norroway,  
 ’T is thou maun bring her hame.’
- “ The first word that Sir Patriek read,  
 Sae loud, loud laughéd he ;  
 The niest word that Sir Patriek read,  
 The tear blinded his e’e.
- “ ‘ Oh, wha is this has done this deed,  
 And tauld the king o’ me,  
 To send us out, at this time o’ the year,  
 To sail upon the sea ?
- “ ‘ Be it wind, be it weet, be it hail, be it sleet,  
 Our ship must sail the faim ;  
 The king’s daughter of Norroway,—  
 ’T is we must fetch her hame.’
- “ They hoysed their sails on Monenday morn,  
 Wi’ a’ the speed they may :  
 They ha’e landed in Norroway,  
 Upon a Wodensday.
- “ They had na been a week, a week,  
 In Norroway, but twae,  
 When that the lords of Norroway  
 Began aloud to say,—
- “ ‘ Ye Scottishmen spend a’ our king’s gowd,  
 And a’ our queene’s fee.’  
 ‘ Ye lie, ye lie, ye liars laud,  
 Fu’ laud I hear ye lie.
- “ ‘ For I brought as much white monie  
 As gars my men and me ;  
 And I brought a half-fu’ of gude red gowd  
 Out ower the sea wi’ me.

- “ ‘ Make ready, make ready, my merry men a’,  
Our gude ship sails the morn ;’  
‘ Now ever alack, my master dear !  
I fear a deadly storm.
- “ ‘ I saw the new moon, late yestre’en,  
Wi’ the old moon in her arm ;  
And if we gang to sea, master,  
I fear we’ll come to harm.’
- “ They had na’ sailed a league, a league,  
A league but barely three,  
When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud,  
And gurly grew the sea.
- “ The ankers brake and the topmasts lap,  
It was sic a deadly storm ;  
And the waves camc o’er the broken ship  
Till a’ her sides were torn.
- “ ‘ Oh, where will I get a gude sailor,  
To take my helm in hand  
Till I get up to the tall topmast  
To see if I can spy land ? ’
- “ ‘ Oh, here am I, a sailor gude,  
To take the helm in hand,  
Till you go up to the tall topmast :  
But I fear you ’ll ne’er spy land.’
- “ He had na’ gane a step, a step,—  
A step but barely ane,—  
When a bout flew out of (the) goodly ship,  
And the salt sea it came in.
- “ ‘ Gae fetch a web o’ the silken claith,  
Another o’ the twine,  
And wap them into our ship’s side,  
And let na’ the sea come in.’
- “ They fetch’d a web o’ the silken claith,  
Another o’ the twine,  
And they wapp’d them round that gude ship’s side,  
But still the sea cam in.
- “ Oh, laith, laith were our gude Scots lords  
To weet their cork-heel’d shoon ;  
But lang or a’ the play was play’d  
They wat their hats aboon.
- “ And mony was the feather-bed  
That flutter’d on the faim ;  
And mony was the gude lord’s son  
That never mair cam hame.

“The ladies wrang their fingers white,  
The maidens tore their hair,  
A’ for the sake of their true loves,—  
For them they ’ll see nae mair.

“Half ower, half owér to Heberdom  
’Tis fifty fathoms deep,  
And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens,  
Wi’ the Scots lords at his feet.”

Let me take leave of these ancient strains with one very short fragment,—Armstrong’s “Good-night,”—in which, if I have been presuming too much upon your patience, you may find a wish of your own expressed for you :—

“This night is my departing night ;  
For here nae longer must I stay ;  
There’s neither friend nor foe o’ mine  
But wishes me away.

“What I have done through lack of wit  
I never, never can recall ;  
I hope ye’re a’ my friends as yet :  
Good-night, and joy be with you all.”



## LECTURE V.

### Shakspeare.

SPENSER'S DEATH AND SHAKSPEARE'S BIRTH—INFLUENCE OF THE AGE—INDEPENDENCE OF HIS IMAGINARY CREATIONS—SMALL KNOWLEDGE OF THE INDIVIDUAL—UNSELFISHNESS OF GENIUS—A SPIRITUAL VOICE IN ALL TIME—SHAKSPEARE TRADITIONS—HIS BIRTH, A. D. 1564—DEATH, A. D. 1616—CERVANTES'S DEATH—EPITAPH—EDUCATION—BEN JONSON—POWER OVER LANGUAGE—THE DRAMATIC ART CONGENIAL TO HIS GENIUS—KENILWORTH AND QUEEN ELIZABETH—SHAKSPEARE IN LONDON—THE ARMADA—HIS PATRIOTISM AND LOYALTY—SUBJECTIVENESS OF THE MODERN EUROPEAN MIND—SHAKSPEARE AND BACON—VENUS AND ADONIS—LUCRECE—THE DRAMAS—THE SONNETS—DRAMATIC ART IN ENGLAND—SACRED DRAMAS—MYSTERIES AND MORALITIES—HEYWOOD—MINOR DRAMATISTS—"THE GENTLE SHAKSPEARE"—THE ACTING DRAMA—PRIMITIVE THEATRES—MODERN ADAPTATIONS—LEAR AND RICHARD III.—THE SUPERNATURAL OF THE DRAMA—MACBETH—THE TEMPEST HIS LAST POEM.

AT the very time when, in an obscure lodging in London, the gentle spirit of Edmund Spenser was passing away from its fresh sorrows and the worldly troubles so meekly complained of in various passages of his poems, there was dwelling under some humble roof of the same city the mightiest of his many contemporaries among the poets,—WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE. The beginning of his dramatic career dates about the time of the publication of the "Fairy Queen," not far from the close of the sixteenth century. The term of his authorship belongs not, like Spenser's, exclusively to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, but, beginning in that reign, it survives during a portion of that of her successor, James I.

At the outset of these lectures I took occasion to recognise as one of the offices of criticism to trace the correspondence between the spirit of a great author and that of his age and country, as well as the course of his personal life. The historical and biographical illustrations have a value which no careful student should overlook; for often he will find that a knowledge of the temper of the times, the characteristics of the age, and the individual position of the author, will give a deeper insight into his genius. But, important as this process of criticism is, it is essentially subordinate to the higher functions of criticism,—the philosophy of judging the creations of genius by immutable principles of truth, above the range of all that is local, personal, or temporary. It is a prime element of the best order of intellectual endowment to dwell,



sunlike, in a light of its own; and he who seeks to illustrate by external and reflected rays alone shuts his eyes to the chief source of its illumination.

The first principle which meets my reflections upon Shakspeare is the independence of his imaginative creations of all the incidents which are valuable in the appreciation of most works of genius. We know, indeed, the age and the character of the age in which he lived; but, as if to teach the principle just stated, the materials of knowledge of Shakspeare's personal history have in all important particulars been swept away. We do not even know how to spell his name,—a question of orthography on which recently in England there has been a very animated discussion, occasioned by the discovery of one of the very rare autographs of the poet; and the argument goes pretty strongly to show that the usual way is a wrong way.

Of the man Shakspeare we know literally nothing that is of any worth for the exposition of his character as a poet. The letters which made up his name are far less symbolical of the personal existence of a human being than of the creative origin of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear, and Cordelia, or Juliet and Desdemona, and the other realities that rise up in our thoughts at the sight or sound of the word "Shakspeare." From his individual history nothing ever intrudes to disturb the perfect impression made by those inventions into which he seems to have transferred his whole nature,—this self-forgetfulness, this unconscious self-devotion, bearing witness to the perfection of his creative powers. This transmigration, as it were, of a great poet's spirit into the characters he invents or the ideas he embodies has furnished an eloquent living divine an apposite illustration in expounding the Christian duty of self-sacrifice; and I quote the passage for its reflex connection with the subject now under discussion:—

"Whatever has been truly excellent among the products of the human mind has sprung from the very same source of all good, both in the natural and in the moral world,—the spirit of self-sacrifice. Look, for example, at poetry. The might of the imagination is manifested by its launching forth from the petty creek, where the accidents of birth moored it, into the wide ocean of being,—by its going abroad into the world around, passing into whatever it meets with, animating it and becoming one with it. This complete union and identification of the poet with his poem—this suppression of his own individual, insulated consciousness, with its narrowness of thought and pettinesses of feeling—is what we admire in the great masters of that which, for this reason, we justly call classical poetry, as representing that which is symbolical

and universal,—not that which is merely occasional and peculiar. This gives them that majestic calmness which still breathes upon us from the statues of their gods. This invests their works with that lucid, transparent atmosphere wherein every form stands out in perfect distinctness, only beautified by the distance which idealizes it. This has delivered those works from the casualties of time and space, and has lifted them up, like stars, into the pure firmament of thought; so that they do not shine on one spot alone, nor fade like earthly flowers, but journey on from clime to clime, shedding the light of beauty on generation after generation. The same quality amounting to a total extinction of his own selfish being, so that his spirit became a mighty organ through which nature gave utterance to the full diapason of her notes, is what we wonder at in our own great dramatist, and is the groundwork of all his other powers; for it is only when purged of selfishness that the intellect becomes fitted for receiving the inspirations of genius.”

The loss, therefore, of biographical information respecting the English Dramatist ceases to be to me a subject of regret, because his genius was not swayed by time, or place, or fortune. It is a small conception which presents Shakspeare to our minds in his individual personality, limited to one tract of the earth, and one tract of time, and to one little island, one little half-century. To the truer thought the idea of Shakspeare comes as the idea of a voice,—a spiritual voice, mighty and multitudinous, like the ocean’s voice in mid-Atlantic, attuned to no age and echoing to no shore;—and, like ocean too, taking its colour from its own unfathomed deep, and not from the soil of the lands it beats upon. I repeat that I know of not a single incident in the obscure story of Shakspeare’s life of significance for the study of his poetry. Yet there has prevailed on this point—naturally, too—an insatiable curiosity, the fruit of which has been the accumulation of as much rubbish as was ever raked into one heap by the industry of one impulse. I would be the last to attempt to brush away a literary tradition, no matter how remote or how frail the testimony on which it rested, did I not detect the feature of a falsehood. In the absence of authentic materials for a biography of Shakspeare, conjecture has been busy, with a licentiousness of speculation which makes it necessary to take the stand of unbelief. It is, of course, not my intention to spend more of your time on this part of my subject, dismissing it as worthless: one or two specimens of this gossip will abundantly serve the purpose.

The absurd story of Shakspeare having earned a livelihood by holding horses at the theatre door was originally stated with an imposing array of the oral tradition on which it rested. Its claims to belief may be

best judged of simply by quoting that authority. Sir William Davenant told it Mr. Betterton, who communicated it to Mr. Rowe; Mr. Rowe told it to Mr. Pope, and Mr. Pope told it to Dr. Newton, and Dr. Newton told it to a gentleman—probably Dr. Johnson—who told it to a man who, some two hundred years after the alleged event, put it in print in a book, which, I may add, is remarkable for having no less than two falsehoods incorporated in the few capital words of its title-page. The tradition of Shakspeare's deer-stealing adventure and his consequent flight from a criminal prosecution has a little better claim to belief, but still with several improbabilities which make it safer to leave it to the receptacle of the fabulous.

All that is known with certainty of Shakspeare is known to every one. His birth, 25th of April, in the year 1564, at Stratford-upon-the-Avon; his youthful marriage; his removal to London, and theatrical career,—an actor, a manager, and a dramatic poet; his return to his native town a prosperous gentleman; his death in the year 1616, on the anniversary day of his birth, and on the selfsame day on which, in a remote region of Europe, the great master of Spanish fiction, Cervantes, breathed his last. In the church in which the child Shakspeare had, no doubt, been trained to worship, his body was buried, beneath an inscription strong with the powers of his pen, and with an active energy to guard for centuries the sanctity of the grave; for, amid all the vapid enthusiasm of Stratford jubilees, and such senseless adoration as led one of his admirers to whitewash the antique bust upon his monument, if ever rash mortal dreamed of transferring the mouldering remains to a prouder mausoleum, there issued, as it were, from the very sepulchre a calm but appalling voice :—

“ Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear  
To dig the bones enclosed here.  
Blest be the man that spares these stones,  
And eurst be he that moves my bones ! ”

In the village church let the honoured dust sleep till its eternal waking in quietness, the stream that sounded on his ear in childhood for ever flowing near. While the genius of Shakspeare has gone, like the ashes of Wiclif's body, scattered first into the Avon, from Avon into Severn, from Severn into the narrow seas, then into the main ocean, and thus dispersed all the world over, the fit place for his perishable body is the grave that first received it; better than a stately sepulchre in the company of England's dead poets, beneath an abbey's roof. In the words of one who knew him in his bodily presence,—

“Under this curléd marble of thine own,  
Sleep, rare tragedian ! Shakspeare, sleep alone !”

I have thus purposely disposed in a very cursory manner of the facts of Shakspeare's life. But, while I would avoid the fruitless and illusive process of conjecture founded upon imperfect testimony,—the fitful flash of speculation,—I am not disposed to turn away from this portion of my subject without endeavouring to cast upon it the meek light of imagination. The first twenty-three years of Shakspeare's life—nearly half of his mortal existence, and a precious part of it—were spent in the place of his birth. A good deal of disquisition has been, it seems to me, somewhat vainly expended on the question of his learning, and a general impression has been the result that he was an uneducated prodigy ; in support of which opinion is a well-known phrase of Ben Jonson's, attributing to his illustrious contemporary “*small Latin and less Greek*.” Ben Jonson was a scholar of profound classical erndition ; and, if we were to take his standard and apply it to the educated community in general, I apprehend that many of us, under his Latin and Greek measnrement, might come out with a more diminutive result than that which has been perverted to sanction the opinion of Shakspeare's deficiency. From the respectable condition of his family, and still more from the easy and natural tone of even his early productions,—that tone of learning incorporated into the mind which it is so hard for an uneducated man to affect,—I have no donbt that Shakspeare's acquirements, so far from being below the standard of ordinary education, were such as to entitle him to rank among the well-educated, even though afterwards, in his intercourse with the literature of other languages,—the ancient and the foreign,—he had reconrse to the secondary medium of translation. But how utterly insignificant does such an inquiry become when, turning from the matter of mere tuition, we strive after some conception, imperfect as it must be, of the self-formative process of Shakspeare's mind,—or, to express myself with more truth, the growth of his genius under the various ripening influences given for its development, not less than the implanting of its primal germ and elements ! When, reasoning of Shakspeare as of other men, we seek for the ordinary causes which first suggest themselves, to account, for instance, for his power over the language, for his description of the visible outward world, and for that which distinguishes him above all other authors,—his knowledge of human nature, his familiarity with the visionary region of the heart,—how inadequate are such causes to explain the wondrous results ! To say, indeed, that in early life he was a thoughtful and snsceptible observer of all that could enter the avenues



of sense, all earthly and all skyey influencees,—that he meditated on the hidden wealth of the English language,—that he was a student of the emotions and manners of his fellow-men,—and, more than all, that he held deep and unbroken communion with his own spirit,—would be to assert no more than reason warrants. But reason at the same time tells us that more yet is needed to solve the mystery of the Stratford boy. But it is in vain: nothing is equal to it; there is a depth which neither empiricism, nor experiment, nor observation, nor theory, can fathom. Science is baffled, and all the elaborate statistics of education give no light. Where did Shakspeare gather the stores that he poured forth on an astonished world? Was it at Stratford? was it at London? was it in school?—in the throng of the market or the highway? Was it in each or in all of these? More, more is needed; and, when an inquiry of this kind is instituted, we feel disposed to fall back to the simple belief of the fine image of Shakspeare's childhood in Gray's "Progress of Poesy:"—

"Far from the sun and summer gale,  
In thy green lap, was nature's darling laid,  
What time where lucid Avon stray'd.  
To him the mighty mother did unveil  
Her awful face. The dauntless child  
Stretch'd forth his little arms and smiled."

If the growth of Shakspeare's transcendent powers defies all speculation, there is yet reason to believe that we may trace some influencees which gave his genius a direction to the form of dramatic composition. That this is the species of authorship eminently congenial to him is manifest to the least reflective on the unequalled facility with which he transfused himself, as it were, into the very character and life of his inventions. The town of Stratford is known to have been visited, during the opening years of Shakspeare's manhood, by several sets of players in the service of different noblemen, especially the Earl of Leicester, whose name suggests the mention of a fact of some interest, from its probable connection with Shakspeare's boyhood. Between Kenilworth Castle, the residence of that nobleman, and the town of Stratford, the distance is that of but a few miles; and, when the noble residence was lighted with the sumptuous display of the princely festivities with which the visit of the Queen was welcomed by her unworthy and unprincipled favourite, Shakspeare was a youth, in the full flush of his twelfth year; and, amid the theories and conjectures to fill the blank of the unknown story of his life, I know of none more plausible than his presence on that animated occasion. It was a scene



every way calculated to enkindle the sparks of youthful enthusiasm and genius. There was the sovereign (and it was an age when all took delight in the sentiment of personal loyalty to the monarch,—and that monarch was a woman,—without pausing to question the wisdom of that instinct of a dutiful and loving subject); there were the nobles who accompanied her on those stately progresses with which, in various quarters of the realm, she won the affections of the people by an almost social intercourse. During the Queen's visit to Kenilworth there were songs and ballads, recitations of the old romances, the chanting of the minstrelsy, and, more than all, the dramatic pageants elaborately prepared to crown the festivities. When we think of what was transpiring at Kenilworth, a little space away from the home of the boy Shakspeare, it might almost be said that we know that he was there. It is to be regretted that, in the work of fiction in which the imagination of the most successful novelist of modern times has revived the long-buried splendour of Kenilworth, advantage was not taken of the probability I have alluded to, instead of the anachronism of referring to the achievements of Shakspeare's mature years. Scott's memory of his own childhood and youth was vivid; and I know of no finer theme for his imagination, strengthened by deep self-communion, than to have presented the youthful poet mingling with the throng at the castle of the Earl of Leicester,—a thoughtful boy, firing his genius by the light that blazed around the Virgin Queen.

The same year in which it is supposed Shakspeare left his native place for a residence in London was a period in the national history of England; for it was the time when stout English hearts and the tempestuous alliance of the elements had not only saved the soil from the pollution of a foreign invasion, but had driven the scattered fragments of the Armada, not back to the calm ports of Spain, but as far north as the stormy latitude of the Hebrides. There must have been then a high patriotic fervour kindling and filling each true and ample heart. I speak of these things because I cannot for a moment hesitate in believing that in this lofty emotion no heart more largely shared than the large heart that beat in the breast of William Shakspeare. I should not question its influence upon his genius, even if I did not see in his dramas signs enough of his intense nationality. He was too right-minded—too right-hearted in his genius—to be other than a lover of his own country and its men. There was in him no morbid and false-hearted disloyalty to the soil that wrapped the bowes of his fathers; no fantastic cosmopolitanism or devotion to foreign climes; no such thing as dallying with Italian skies or making court to the snowy

pinnacles of the Alps; but not the least manifestation of his genius was his profound and single-hearted love for England. The intrepid spirit that awaited the assault of Spain speaks in the lines in King John:—Falconbridge proclaiming,—

“This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them.”

And in the whole range of prose and verse there is probably no passage which comes so near to the inspired patriotism of the Bible-poetry—setting forth the glory and sublimity of Jerusalem—as the celebrated panegyric on England in Richard the Second, fitly spoken by the dying lips of “time-honoured Lancaster:”—

“This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise;  
This fortress, built by nature for herself,  
Against infection and the hand of war;  
This happy breed of men, this little world;  
This precious stone, set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.”

It might be expected that an intense nationality and loyalty to the government, as represented in the person of the monarch, should, when these sentiments were as fervid as in the days of Queen Elizabeth, vividly affect the spirit of literature, and especially the dramatic literature, as placed in close contact with popular emotions. It may accordingly be observed not only in such passages as those just quoted; but the heart and the imagination of Shakspeare's most eminent contemporary, Ben Jonson, are full of the same devotion to England and to England's queen; as in his fine lines:—

“May still this island be call'd fortunate,  
And rugged treason tremble at the sound  
When fame shall speak it with an emphasis;  
Let foreign polity be dull as lead,  
And pale invasion come with half a heart,  
When he but looks upon her blessed soil;  
The throat of war be stopp'd within her land,  
And turtle-footed peace dance fairy rings  
About her court, where never may there come  
Suspect or danger, but all trust and safety.”

I have deemed it one element, though a subordinate one, in the true appreciation of Shakspeare's genius,—the idea of the relation subsisting between it and the particular period of his country's history. But he was more than the representative of the mind of England at a certain time. He may be contemplated as the representative of the European mind,—the type of modern intellect as contrasted with the intellect of antiquity. In suggesting that Shakspeare is to be viewed not only in relation to England and to his times,—the actual half-century of his life passing from the sixteenth into the seventeenth century,—but in relation to the whole continent of Europe and to modern ages, I am indebted to the philosophical thought of an accomplished English divine, who, in a recent series of eloquent discourses in the University of Cambridge, alluding to the peculiar habit of thought which has marked the three last centuries, and especially in Protestant countries, goes on to say:—"It has often been observed that what peculiarly distinguishes the modern European mind is its predominant *subjectiveness* as contrasted with the greater *objectiveness* of former ages. This pervades all the forms of life, all the regions of thought. There has been a far deeper self-consciousness, which has often approached to a self-devouring disease; there has been a more minute self-analysis, a more piercing self-anatomy. Speculation has turned its eye inward,—has become more and more reflective. If we cast a look on the two main provinces of intellect in the great age which followed the Reformation, we find that in philosophy the grand achievement of that age was the purifying the method of investigation, the gaining a deeper insight into the laws of thought. . . . On the other hand, what distinguishes the great poet of the age subsequent to the Reformation is—as has been repeated a thousand times—his knowledge of human nature. That is to say, he is not contented, like earlier poets, to represent men as acting and suffering at critical seasons under the sway of passion: he leads us into their hearts and shows us the warfare raging there; not merely the calmness or the suffering of the surface,—the rolling and rushing of the waves: he plunges down into the depths, and enables us to discern what is bubbling up and boiling in the abyss. Herein, too, as he is the master, so is he the representative, of modern poetry, of which the general character has in like manner been reflective instead of instinctive." There seems, to my mind, to be much of the comprehensive grasp of a true philosophy in this attempt to define the intellectual position of Bacon and of Shakspeare as the representatives of modern European intellect in its two great departments,—science and poetry.

In a few years after Shakspeare's removal to London he published

his earlier writings, which presented him as a poet before his appearance as a dramatic poet. These were the short poems of "Venus and Adonis" and "Lucrece." The character of these productions is not such as to make it necessary for me to pause upon them. Their intrinsic merit is no doubt considerable, but at the same time not sufficient to have given their author a fame at all proportionate to his more mature works. Their chief interest is probably derived from the reflected glory of his dramatic authorship; and there is, therefore, the less occasion to judge them independently than to consider whether they gave promise of the great achievements of his genius. It may be questioned whether any one—the most familiar with the spirit of the Shakspearian drama—could by internal evidence conjecture the authorship of the early poems. Unquestionably there may be discerned his exuberance of fancy, the imaginative energy, as manifested by the power of spreading any ruling feeling or passion so as to give its own colour to all that surrounds it, and of throwing himself into his creations. They are expressive of that untried period of genius when it has not yet acquired that composed consciousness which familiarity with its own action gives. The strong figure by which Coleridge criticized these poems was that in them "the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war-embrace." There is indeed, with all the luxuriance of imagery, the condensation of thought which always was one great element of his strength. But what strikes me more than aught else in these early productions is the manifestation of that imperial command over the language, which caused it to serve him as it never did other mortal speaking English words.

Not unfrequently the turn of fancy and of words recall, by a delicate parallelism, some more familiar passages in the dramas, as when Venus addresses Adonis:—

"Bid me discourse: I will enchant thine ear,  
Or, like a fairy, trip upon the green,  
Or, like a nymph with long dishevell'd hair,  
Dance on the sands, and yet no footing seen.  
Love is a spirit all compact of fire,  
Not gross to sink, but light, and will aspire."

The imagery associates itself at once with the exquisite lines in Prospero's address to his fairy ministers:—

"Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,  
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot  
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him  
When he comes back."

These poems—the very firstlings of his heart (to appropriate to them one of his own phrases)—abound in that naturalness and simplicity of language for which Shakspeare's diction is eminent, and which, exempting it from limitation and obsolescence, appropriates it to all time. It is this quality which gives perpetuity to such a stanza as the following, on which it would be impossible to pronounce whether it was composed as early as the sixteenth century or as late as the nineteenth. It is descriptive of Venus mourning over the lifeless body of Adonis:—

“She looks upon his lips, and they are pale!  
 She takes him by the hand, and that is cold!  
 She whispers in his ear a heavy tale;  
 As if they heard the woeful words she told.  
 She lifts the coffer-lids that close his eyes,  
 When, lo! two lamps, burnt out, in darkness lies.”

Or, where he expresses—as so constantly in the plays—a moral reflection, in an apostrophe to Opportunity:—

“The patient dies while the physician sleeps;  
 The orphan pines while the oppressor feeds;  
 Justice is feasting while the widow weeps;  
 Advice is sporting while infection breeds:  
 Thou grant'st no time for charitable deeds.”

Of the poems of Shakspeare,—taking that word in a very narrow sense as contrasted with his plays,—the most remarkable are the sonnets. It is a most mysterious collection; and the mystery which envelopes it seems to be impenetrable to all the ingenuity of the commentators. It is likely to continue a vexed question whom they are addressed to. The address purports to be made to a male friend,—a certain “Mr. W. H.,” as he is enigmatically described on the title-page. It is surely no easy task to decipher two initials employed two hundred years ago, especially as there is such destitution of knowledge of the author's personal history. By some it has been conjectured that the person addressed was the Earl of Southampton, Shakspeare's early patron, to whom his first poems were dedicated; by others (the opinion most plausible), William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. It is the suggestion of another commentator that “Mr. W. H.” was a woman; and, by another, not only a woman, but that “Mr. W. H.,” being interpreted, typified Queen Elizabeth. So that, amid this variety of vain conjectures, I do not see that any better conclusion can be reached than the opinion of one of the most intelligent of the Shakspearian commentators, deeply versed in the early English drama. “After all,” is his remark, “what Lord Byron says of Junius is true concerning the object to whom Shakspeare's sonnets are principally addressed:”—



“ I ’ve an hypothesis,—’t is quite my own :  
 ’T is that what Junius we are wont to call  
 Was really, truly, nobody at all ! ”

But the chief mystery in the sonnets is that they are conceived in a rapturous, amatory strain, not at all concordant with the sober, sedate tone of that rough sentiment, masculine friendship. Their poetical excellence is such as to make them not unworthy of their illustrious authorship. The deep thought, the rich imagery, and the majestic speech of Shakspeare are there. How exquisitely worthy of him who told of Macbeth’s “ way of life, fallen into the serc and yellow leaf,” is such a sonnet as this !—

“ That time of year thou may’st in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
 Upon those boughs which stake against the cold  
 Bare ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang  
 In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
 Which, by-and-by, black night doth take away,—  
 Death’s second self, that seals up all in rest !  
 In me thou seest the glowing of such fire  
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
 Consumed with that which it was nourish’d by !  
 This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more strong  
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.”

How true to the heart which uttered from its own comprehensive sympathy the devotion of the hapless lovers of Verona, and the super-human affection of Desdemona, is the conception of love in these lines !—

“ Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
 Admit impediments. Love is not love  
 Which alters when it alteration finds,  
 Or bends, with the remover to remove.  
 Oh no ! It is an ever-fixed mark,  
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken.  
 It is the star to every wandering bark  
 Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken.  
 Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
 Within his bending sickle’s compass come.  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom ! ”

But the form of poetic composition to which the genius of Shakspeare’s imagination of necessity directed itself was the drama ; and such is his power of creation, of inventing, not a character, a mere

type of any particular passion or trait, but the representative of human nature as it exists in individual reality, with the complexity and variety of elements which make up personal existence,—so wonderful was his might in endowing his creations with lifelike functions and qualities, that, even if tragedy and comedy had not been handed down from antiquity, I can conceive the possibility of Shakspeare's inventing the drama itself to supply the necessities of his imagination! The intrinsic demands of his own genius had far greater influence in controlling his literary career than the mere incident of chance associations with theatrical life on his coming to London.

It is proper, at this point, to look at the condition of English dramatic literature at the time when Shakspeare, with many others, entered that intellectual arena. To trace the drama in England, from its origin to its great Shakspearian consummation, would be a theme far transcending my bounds; but, in a very summary way, I may glance at it. At an early and uncertain period theatrical representations had taken that curious form which prevailed throughout Europe in the Middle Ages,—the *Mysteries*, or *Miracle-plays*. These were scenical stories relating to religious subjects, taken either from Scripture history or the legends of the saints; so that there were theatrical representations of the Creation, of the massacre of the innocents, and the sufferings of various martyrs. It is difficult to realize this phase of the European mind, when the most sacred subjects were thus appropriated without any accompanying sentiment of irreverence or profanity. Many of these dramas I could not venture to describe to you without exposing myself to the reproach of irreverent levity. Another form which the early drama assumed was that of the *Moralities*. These were allegorical dramas made up of abstract personifications, such as "Pride," "Gluttony," "Swift to Sin," "Charity;" and what might be appropriate personifications in our day,—"Learning without Money," and "Money without Learning," and "All for Money." They were the persons of the drama. In the great controversy of the Reformation these devices for edification were freely employed by both divisions of the church to promote their respective opinions. An act of Parliament, in the reign of Henry VIII., for the promotion of true religion, forbade all interludes contradictory to established doctrines.

The "Mysteries" and "Moralities" gradually passed away; but it is not until so late a period as the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth that the beginning of the drama proper can be dated. One or two comedies belong to a somewhat earlier date; but the fame of the first English tragedy belongs to him whose single poetical effort in

another department of poetry I had occasion to refer to in a former lecture with such high commendation,—Sackville, Lord Buckhurst.

But even within the last twenty years of the sixteenth century Sir Philip Sydney could find little on the English stage to save it from his disdainful censure. “It is strange,” remarks Mr. Hallam, “to reflect that this reprehension comes from the pen of Sydney when Shakspeare had just arrived at manhood. Had he not been so prematurely cut off, what would have been the transport of that noble spirit, which the ballad of ‘Chevy Chase’ could stir as with the sound of a trumpet, in reading the ‘Fairy Queen’ or ‘Othello’!”

Before the drama was touched by the wand of Shakspeare it had been much advanced by several dramatists, who, though contemporaneous, were his predecessors in authorship. The most eminent of these were Marlowe and Peele, and one to whom, as to his more illustrious coëval, Stratford had given birth,—Greene. The great dramatic era in English literature began in the middle of Elizabeth’s reign; and, though in some measure checked by the puritan feeling which then began to manifest itself in England, it continued during that of her successor, James I., when it reached its highest eminence, and flourished until the latter part of the turbulent reign which followed; when, in consequence of the tumults and calamities of the civil wars, the theatres were closed. The period designated is very little more than half a century,—from the middle of Elizabeth’s to the end of Charles the First’s reign,—and yet may be said to comprehend almost all the excellence of the English drama. I know of few things more remarkable in literary history than the vast abundance of dramatic literature during this comparatively brief era. A great amount of it has perished; a great amount is inaccessible in the rare original editions. The dramatists were numerous, their productions voluminous. One of them—Heywood—speaks of having had a share in the authorship of two hundred and twenty plays, of which only twenty-five, some of considerable merit, have been preserved. What was remarkable, too, these effusions flowed from their minds with a recklessness as to their preservation, a readiness to commit them to all the casualties of theatrical MSS., with an indifference as to their future destiny, contrasting curiously with that finical precision with which the little literary men of a later generation guard their small wares. I do not remember ever to have met any philosophical attempt to account for the amazing dramatic activity of the age of English literature under consideration. I should probably satisfy neither your minds nor my own were I to endeavour to trace it to that trait of those times,—the admirable blending of action

and contemplation discoverable in many of the illustrious men who then flourished; for instance, Sir Philip Sydney devoting himself to the effort of raising English poetry from the dust, kindling his heart with the strains of the old ballads, or driving the imagination of the gentle Spenser forth from the hermitage of his modesty, and at the same time sharing in affairs of state, in knightly deeds of arms, and meeting death upon the field of battle; or Raleigh, preserving the love of letters throughout his whole varied career at court, in camp, or tempest-tost in his adventures on the ocean. It seems to me that an age thus characterized by the combination of thought and deed in its representative men had its most congenial literature in that of the drama,—*poetry in action*.

As the most agreeable way of enumerating the most distinguished of the English dramatists, I may quote a passage from one of Thomas Heywood's plays, in which he complains, in jest and earnest, of the liberties taken with his fellow-authors:—

“ Our modern poets to that pass are driven,  
 Those names are curtail'd which they first had given;  
 And, as we wish'd to have their memories drown'd,  
 We scarcely can afford them half their sound.  
*Greene*, who had in both academies ta'en  
 Degree of Master, yet could never gain  
 To be call'd more than *Robin*,—who, had he  
 Profess'd aught save the muse, served, and been free  
 After seven years' apprenticeship, might have  
 (With credit, too) gone *Robert* to his grave;  
*Marlowe*, renown'd for his rare art and wit,  
 Could ne'er attain beyond the name of *Kit*,  
 Although his *Hero* and *Leander* did  
 Merit addition rather; famous *Kid*  
 Was call'd but *Tom*,—*Tom Watson*, though he wrote  
 Able to make *Apollo's* self to dote  
 Upon his muse, for all that he could strive,  
 Yet never could to his full name arrive;  
*Tom Nash* (in his time of no small esteem)  
 Could not a second syllable redeem;  
 Excellent *Beaumont*, in the foremost rank  
 Of the rarest wits, was never more than *Frank*;  
 Mellifluous SHAKESPEARE, whose enchanting quill  
 Commanded mirth or passion, was but *Will*;  
 And famous *Jonson*, tho' his learned pen  
 Be dipt in *Castaly*, is still but *Ben*;  
*Fletcher* and *Webster*, of that learned pack  
 None of the meanest, neither was but *Jack*;

*Decker*, but *Tom*; nor *May* nor *Middleton*;  
 And he's now but *Jack Ford* that once were *John*.  
 Nor speak I this that any here exprest  
 Should think themselves less worthy than the rest  
 Whose names have their full syllables and sound;  
 Or that *Frank*, *Kit*, or *Jack* are the least wound  
 Unto their fame and merit. I, for my part  
 (Think others what they please), accept that heart  
 Which courts my love in most familiar phrase:  
 And that it takes not from my pains or praise  
 If any one to me so bluntly come;  
 I hold he loves me best who calls me *Tom*."

Charles Lamb, to whose admirable "Specimens of the Early Dramatists" I am indebted for this passage, sensibly remarks that the familiarity of common discourse would be apt to take greater liberties with the dramatic poets, as being more upon a level with stage-actors; and that the familiarity did not reach to the other poets, for we hear nothing of *Sam Daniel* or *Ned Spenser*.

I must confine these my cursory notices of the dramatists to the contemplation of Shakspeare's relative attitude in the midst of them. A living man, he mingled with them on the social terms of a friendly equality and intellectual independence. He was "*the gentle Shakspeare*;" and all reason bids us to believe that his spirit knew not the stain of any mean envy or vulgar spite. In the sight of later generations, equality with that dramatic legion, the host of his precursors, his contemporaries, and his successors, is not recognised. They were indeed poets too, with high imaginations, with high intellects, some with high learning; but he is seen standing amid the long range like Chimborazo overtopping the Andes. The learned editor of several of the early dramatists remarks, "A careful perusal of every existing drama of the reigns of Elizabeth and James has thoroughly convinced me of the immeasurable superiority of Shakspeare to all the playwrights of his time." I am not, I trust, insensible to the invention and power displayed by Fletcher, Jonson, Ford, Webster, Heywood, Middleton, and the rest of that illustrious brotherhood; but I feel that over the worst of Shakspeare's dramas his genius has diffused a peculiar charm, of which their best productions are entirely destitute; and to insinuate that any of his contemporaries ever produced a play worthy of being ranked with his happiest efforts—with "*Othello*," for instance, "*Macbeth*," "*Lear*," or "*Hamlet*,"—seems to me an absurdity unpardonable in any critic.

Again: that large-minded and open-hearted critic, Charles Lamb, an-



nounced as one design of his "Specimens of the Early Drama" to show how much of Shakspeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind.

Accustomed as we are to such elevated conceptions of Shakspeare's powers, it makes a strange impression on the mind when we first read a description of the theatrical representations for which his writings were originally intended. The rude fashion of the buildings, and the still ruder fashion of the audience, seem singularly incongruous. "The amusements," we are told, "of the audience, previous to the commencement of the play, were reading, playing at cards, smoking tobacco, drinking ale, and eating nuts and apples. Even during the performance, it was customary for wits and critics, and young gallants who were desirous of attracting attention, to station themselves on the stage, either lying on the rushes or seated on hired stools, while their pages furnished them with pipes and tobacco." To these animals Shakspeare cast the pearls of his philosophy! To think that to such as these were first spoken the deep-souled melancholy, the heart-stricken meditations, of Hamlet! In one particular, it has been well remarked the destitute condition of the early theatre was propitious to the poetry of the drama,—the absence of all moveable scenery or scenic preparations rendering it necessary to appeal solely and strongly to the imagination of the hearer; for had there been any ambitious imitation by painted canvas, we might not have stood with Lear on the cliffs of Dover, or amid the palaces of Venice with Shylock and Antonio.

The theatrical inadequacy in Shakspeare's own times suggests the inquiry whether the stage at any period is competent to the representation of his wonderful productions. Not questioning that occasionally a single part may be enacted with ability, I do not hesitate to believe that, for integrity of impression, the stage is utterly and universally incompetent; and, still more, that it intrudes into the imagination low, mean, and false associations,—notions which it is hard to purge the mind of. And therefore I rejoice that every year the representation of Shakspeare's plays is becoming less and less frequent. The satisfaction of witnessing the masterly representation of a chief part by a great actor is purchased at too high a cost.

How, for instance, can flesh and blood, of the lightest texture, deal with the representation of such a creature as Ariel, so ethereal that he speeds on Prospero's mandate,—

"I drink the air before me, and return  
Or e'er your pulse twice beat,"—

and, while doing his spiriting gently in his earthly master's service, can yet sing a bird-like song, a fairy's lyric, such as only Shakspeare's sweet fancy could have framed :—

“ Where the bee sucks, there suck I ;  
 In a cowslip's bell I lie ;  
 There I couch when owls do cry ;  
 On the bat's back I do fly,  
 After summer, merrily ;  
 Merrily, merrily shall I live now,  
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

What has the stage ever done for the weird sisters in “Macbeth”? The curtain rises, and there stand three figures, tattered and grotesque-looking,—very like those wretched vagrants to be seen in our streets picking rags and scraps from out the gutters ; and the first sounds they utter reveal that the parts are filled by the comic actors of the company, —the very tones of whose voices come associated with vulgar buffoonery and ribaldry. And these are the chosen representations of those terrific creations ! and thus that mighty work of genius, crimson-dyed in the blood of tragedy, is ushered in like a farce ! No ; the myriad mind of Shakspeare is a region too lofty and too pure for scenic art to reach. The genius of Garrick sank beneath the effort. The best acting plays are the works of far inferior dramatists ; but for Shakspeare let no one put his intellect in pledge to receive his idea from the players. Indeed, several of his chief dramas have been vilely mutilated for the very purpose of adapting them to the stage. In “Richard the Third,” passages have been interpolated which the heart of the poet would have repudiated with disgust. In the “Tempest” there was not love enough ; and actually a second pair of lovers has been thrust in, mar- ring the lovely impression of those sweet interviews of Ferdinand and Miranda. “Romeo and Juliet” was not tragic enough ; and a little more grief is patched on the catastrophe. “King Lear” was too tragic, and the catastrophe must be abated.

The inadequacy of the stage—not only for Shakspeare's supernatural creations, but even his human characters—has been admirably discussed by Charles Lamb, in one of his peculiar and inimitable essays. “The Lear of Shakspeare,” he remarks, “cannot be acted. It is essentially impossible to be represented on a stage : the contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm he goes out in is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements than any actor can be to represent Lear ; they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures.

The greatness of Lear is not in corporeal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passions are terrible as a volcano; they are storms, turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on, even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporeal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear; we are in his mind; we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms. . . . What have looks or tones to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*, when, in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that 'they themselves are old'? What gesture shall we appropriate to this? what has the voice or the eye to do with such things? But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show. It is too hard and stony; it must have love-scenes and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter; she must shine as a lover too. . . . A happy ending!—As if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through, the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after,—if he could sustain this world's burden after,—why all this pudder and preparation? why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station!—as if, at his years and with his experience, anything was left but to die."

The knowledge of the drama of Shakspeare is to be gained by deep and careful study,—study thoughtful and imaginative; that is, not only by reflection and meditation on the wisdom of his oracular poetry, but by sympathetic action of the imagination, so as to realize what he creates. Just in proportion to the intensity of this imaginative effort will be the completeness of conception formed of any of these inventions. Thus only do they leave an integrity of impression. For instance, it is essential to the true appreciation of "Macbeth" to realize the supernatural atmosphere which envelopes the action of that tragedy with all its rapidity of movement. It is set in a shadowy, spectral region of witches and dreams and nightmare; of visions to the open eye of the wakeful and the sealed eye of the sleeping; of invisible and mysterious powers in the elements, and the prophetic sight of distant dynasties of kings; of incantations; of voiceless ghosts arising from bloody graves,—blood-bolstered visitants from charnel-houses; of the gloomy presentiments of the innocent and the more fearful hauntings of a blood-stained

conscience. The brief scene the drama opens with stamps its whole character. It is a wild and instant appeal to the imagination, especially by the absence of all definite designation. The scene, "an open place:" amid thunder and lightning; the turmoil and carnage of war close at hand; the three witches, kinless, nameless,—sexless too, I may say; the weird women with beards, seenting the blood of a battle-field, meet, to meet again, to seal the deep damnation of their vietim. Their fatal intent thus darkly intimated, they answer to mysterious calls of you know not what,—“Paddock” and “Graymalkin;” and, ere you have well known their presence, they vanish, with wild utterance of the confusion and murkiness of a demon’s heart:—

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair;  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.”

In short space they come again,—these posters of the sea and land,—hastening from witchcraft mischief, gloating over the treasure of—

“A pilot’s thumb,  
Wreck’d as homeward he did come.”

And then, catching somewhat of sublimity from the greatness of the malice, they rise suddenly to the full stature of their supernatural strength, and, on the blasted heath, proclaim their prophetic salutation to Macbeth and Banquo. The sun shines out a little while on that sweet landscape in which Duncan is moving on with sacrificial meekness to his slaughter. As the guilt deepens, the supernatural atmosphere thickens with it,—visions and dreams and spiritual voices:—

“Lamentings heard i’ the air; strange screams of death;  
And prophesying, with accents terrible,  
Of dire combustion and confused events,  
New hatch’d to the woeful time.”

There are Banquo’s dreams of the weird sisters, and the bosom-weight of his gloomy presentiment; the fatal vision of “the air-drawn dagger,” with its “gouts of blood;” the broken sleep of the surfeited grooms, their laughter, their terror, and their prayers; and the wild curse in the air of eternal wakefulness: and all this magnified and distorted through the medium of a murderous, burning brain:—

“There’s one did laugh in his sleep, and one cried, *murder!*  
That they did wake each other; I stood and heard them;  
But they did say their prayers, and address’d them  
Again to sleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

“One cried, *God bless us!* and, *Amen*, the other;  
As they had seen me, with these hangman’s hands,  
Listening their fear; I could not say, *Amen*,  
When they did say, *God bless us*.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Methought I heard a voice cry, *Sleep no more!*  
*Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep;*  
*Sleep, that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,*  
*The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,*  
*Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,*  
*Chief nourisher in life’s feast.*

\* \* \* \* \*

“Still it cried, *Sleep no more!* to all the house;  
*Glamis hath murder’d sleep; and therefore Cawdor*  
*Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more!”*

The storm without is raging; and who can doubt that the witches were riding on the blast and untying the winds on that unruly night? The whole domain of Macbeth’s castle is impregnated with the supernatural atmosphere:—the raven croaking over the battlements, the owl screaming, the obscene bird clamouring the livelong night,—

“Duncan’s horses, . . .  
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
Turn’d wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
Contending ’gainst obedience, as they would make  
War with mankind.”

At a more advanced part of the tragedy the supernatural begins to fade away; “the dark and midnight hags”—whom the tyrant tampers with while their toils are winding closer and closer round him—vanish with Macbeth’s curse upon them:—

“Infected be the air whereon they ride,  
And damn’d all those that trust them.”

And when we draw near the catastrophe of the drama we almost forget the witchery of the weird sisters. Their mighty and superhuman malice has been achieved, and then all is left to human vice, human passion, human misery. The high-wrought spirituality of the tragedy has its sublime close in the slumbering agitation of Lady Macbeth,—that terrific, open-eyed, sleep-walking, sleep-talking,—and the never-ending misery of the blood-stained hand,—the appalling incoherencies of the hauntings of guilt:—

“Out, damned spot! out, I say! . . . Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? . . . I tell you yet again, Banquo’s buried; he cannot come out of his grave. . . .



Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little haud."

At the last the supernatural has passed wholly away; the witches, the ghosts, the incantations, and the dreams,—all are gone; and Macbeth, forsaken by the suicide of his fiend-like queen, is left alone,—the sea of blood sweeping him onward, helpless, hopeless; for its red tide has washed out, one by one, the promises that witchcraft had written upon sand, and, with wild misgivings of all realities, he stands, "a-weary of the sun," upon a desert spot of this bank and shoal of time;—behind him the furies of a murderous memory, before him the blackness of an accursed darkness, and, in its centre, Death.

Taking the thought from this tragedy, the remark may be generalized on the whole Shakspearian drama, that all the sympathies it gives are with goodness, all its hatred of vice. Disfigured though it be in spots by the grossness of his times, or, still more, of theatrical interpolations, it is ministrant in the cause of virtue; and the commentator on Shakspeare has no more important office than to illustrate the sanity of his genius,—his intellectual and moral healthfulness. The large sympathy he communicates is comprehensive not only of afflicted virtue, but also when human frailty has brought down calamities on its own head. The tragedies abound with this forgiving temper, this Christian spirit of pity, this teaching of brotherly kindness and fervent charity, not trampling on a fellow-being, rejoicing in his sorrows because he deserved them, but restoring him in the spirit of meekness. What, for instance, at the outset, is Lear, but a weak, petulant, doting, headstrong, selfish, foolish old man? But how are we not taught to forget and forgive all this when his woes throng round him! His intellectual power rising with his misery, and his sublime madness giving him unwonted dignity, we have at last but one feeling for the child-changed father.

Observe, too, this trait in the historical drama of "Richard the Second." You look on him at first as at once arbitrary and imbecile,—heartless, vain, and violent; but, when affliction comes, his sense of royalty rises in as majestic a strain as ever proclaimed the divine right of kings:—

"When the searching eye of heaven is hid  
Behind the globe, and lights the lower world,  
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen,  
In murders and in outrage, bloody here;  
But when, from under this terrestrial ball,  
He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines,  
And darts his light through every guilty hole,—  
Then murders, treasons, and detested sins,

The cloak of night being pluck'd from off their backs,  
 Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves.  
 So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,—  
 Who all the while hath revell'd in the night,  
 Whilst we were wandering with the antipodes,—  
 Shall see us rising in our throne the east,  
 His treasons will sit blushing in his face,  
 Not able to endure the sight of day,  
 But, self-affrighted, tremble at his sin.  
*Not all the water in the rough rude sea*  
*Can wash the balm from an anointed king ;*  
 The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
 The deputy elected by the Lord :  
 For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd  
 To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,  
 God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay  
 A glorious angel : then, if angels fight,  
 Weak men must fall ; for Heaven still guards the right."

And how exquisitely is our sympathy conciliated by the description of Richard's majesty waning in the presence of the rising popularity of Bolingbroke !—

" Men's eyes  
 Did scowl on Richard ; no man cried, God save him !  
 No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home ;  
 But dust was thrown upon his sacred head ;  
 Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,—  
 His face still combating with tears and smiles,  
 The badges of his grief and patience,—  
 That, had not God, for some strong purpose, steel'd  
 The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted,  
 And barbarism itself have pitied him."

I trust that no one has been so uncharitable as to impute to me the absurdity of fancying that one lecture could embrace more than a very inadequate proportion of what is due to the vast theme. I dare not trust myself even to name the various unnoticed considerations respecting the genius of Shakspeare, for they rise up to my mind in throngs. When I was obliged to close my incomplete examination of Spenser's "Fairy Queen," I presumed distantly to intimate the hope that some future occasion might give me ampler space for our converse with that wondrous allegory. May I venture now to add the expression of a feeling—of course, merely my own—that, so far as I am concerned, I can promise myself no better pleasure than, at some future time, with the light of the same kind and intelligent faces upon me, to enter upon

the studious and reverential consideration of the whole series of the dramas of Shakspeare?

In conclusion: a few words of Shakspeare himself. It is said that the last of his poems was the "Tempest;" and certainly the close is finely typical of the close of his career of authorship. The most touching of the series of his sonnets are the confessional ones, in which he mourns over the contamination of his pure and gentle spirit by the uncongenial courses of a player's trade:—

"Alas! 't is true I have gone here and there,  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,  
Made old offences of affections new.

\*                      \*                      \*                      \*

Oh, for my sake do you with fortune chide,  
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide,  
Than public means, which public manners breeds.  
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;  
And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

When, in the maturity of his powers, Shakspeare turned away from London and sought the sweet places of his innocent childhood, we can almost hear him, in the words of Prospero, abjuring his magic, dismissing the spiritual creations of his imagination, and looking to the tranquil village he was born in, where

"Every third thought shall be my grave."

The highest glory of Shakspeare's poetry is its spirituality. With all its quick sympathies with things of sight, it is full of the life by faith. Kindred at once to earth and heaven, it realizes what Wordsworth, with a noble image, grandly tells:—

"Truth shows a glorious face  
While, on that isthmus which commands  
The councils of both worlds, she stands."

There is many a trace to show how deep was Shakspeare's sense of the perishable nature of the things of time. How deeper still was his sense of eternity and its glories! Reflect on that fine passage in "Antony and Cleopatra," when the Roman feels that his own fortunes and ancient Egypt's power are lost for ever:—

"Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;  
A vapour, sometime, like a bear, or lion,  
A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,  
A forkéd mountain, or blue promontory

With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world  
 And mock our eyes with air; thou hast seen these signs;  
 They are black vesper's pageants."

\* \* \* \* \*

"That which is now a horse, even with a thought  
 The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct,  
 As water is in water."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Eros, now thy captain is  
 Even such a body: here I am Antony;  
 Yet cannot hold this visible shape."

Now, with this compare the hopeful, faithful spirit in a passage which has been considered, perhaps, the most sublime in Shakspeare:—

"Look how the floor of heaven  
 Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold;  
 There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,  
 But in his motion like an angel sings,  
 Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims:  
 Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
 But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

It is worthy of reflection, that wherever a holy subject is touched by Shakspeare it is with a deep sentiment of unaffected reverence. The parting thought I have of his genius is, that not vainly were spent in the comparative loneliness of the Avon village those last silent years of him who could place on the tongue of his saintly Isabella such fit and feeling words on the most sacred of all sacred themes:—

"Alas!—alas!"

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once,  
 And He that might the vantage best have took  
 Found out the remedy. How would you be  
 If he, which is the top of judgment, should  
 But judge you as you are? Oh, think on that;  
 And mercy then will breathe within your lips,  
 Like man new made."

## LECTURE VI.

### Milton.

ABUNDANCE OF BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS—DR. JOHNSON'S LIFE—MILTON AMONG THE GREAT PROSE WRITERS—MILTON'S CONCEPTION OF HIS CALLING AS A POET—POETRY THE HIGHEST AIM OF HUMAN INTELLECT—MILTON'S YOUTHFUL GENIUS—STUDY OF HEBREW POETRY—LATIN POEM TO HIS FATHER—THE RURAL HOME—POETIC GENIUS IMPROVED BY STUDY—VISITS TO THE LONDON THEATRES—THOUGHTFUL CULTURE OF HIS POWERS—ALLEGRO AND PENSEROSO—LYCIDAS—DR. JOHNSON'S JUDGMENTS ON THIS POEM—MASQUE OF COMUS—FAITH AND HOPE AND CHASTITY—THE HYMN ON THE NATIVITY—POWER AND MELODY OF THE MILTONIC VERSIFICATION—VISIT TO GALILEO—MILTON IN ROME—STORY OF TASSO'S LIFE—INFLUENCE OVER MILTON—THE REBELLION—THE CONDITION OF THE ENGLISH MONARCHY—THE POET'S DOMESTIC TROUBLES—SONNETS—JOHNSON'S CRITICISMS ON THEM—MILTON'S LATIN DESPATCHES—SONNET ON THE PIEDMONT PERSECUTION—COLERIDGE AND WORDSWORTH ON THE MORAL SUBILITY OF THE POET'S LIFE—THE PARADISE LOST—THE CHARACTER OF SATAN—COLERIDGE'S CRITICISM—THE GRANDEUR OF THE EPIC—THE PARADISE REGAINED—THE SAMSON AGONISTES—POETRY A RELIEF TO THE POET'S OVERCHARGED HEART.

THE birth of Milton, in the year 1608, dates about eight years before the death of Shakspeare, thus preserving the tie of time between the three most glorious of England's poets,—Edmund Spenser, William Shakspeare, and John Milton. In the last lecture I had occasion to remark on the well-known dearth of personal information respecting our great dramatic poet. As to our great epic poet, the contrast in this particular is as striking as possible. Of Shakspeare we know almost nothing; of Milton we know almost everything. The entire collection of his poems, the equally complete collection of his prose works, his official writings, his private correspondence, the incidental mention by his contemporaries, his antobiographical notices,—all are preserved. Stimulated by this abundance of biographical materials, and also by the consideration that Milton's character was illustrative of great principles in various departments of human thought, an unparalleled number of biographers—from his own nephew down to not a few authors within the last few years—have made his memoir their chosen theme. More biographies have been written of him than, perhaps, of any man who ever lived. I have had the curiosity to enumerate them, and could mention no fewer than twenty-five. Of all these, unhappily, the one most read is the one most uncongenial and, in many points, in-



jurious,—that by Dr. Johnson. With every variety of opinion—poetical, political, moral, and theological,—are these biographies tinctured. They have issued from the pens of poets, of antiquaries, of divines, of scholars, of painters, from Churchmen and Dissenters, from infidels, from the high-toned aristocrat, the Whig, and the Chartist.

Milton is a vast and varied theme. He may be viewed in his chief glory as a *poet*. Again, so eventful was his life, that a worthy subject of study is his character as a man. And if, in the endeavour to promote the cause of English literature, I should ever be led to enter upon the series of great prose writers in our language, high among them, along with Bacon and Clarendon, Hooker and Jeremy Taylor and Burke, as among the poets, would be found the name of Milton. Closely as these three representations of the character of Milton are connected,—each giving its illustration to the other,—the subject to which our thoughts are now to be directed is the genius of his poetry.

Important as were many of the other labours of Milton's, it can be shown that at no period—in the buoyancy of youth, in the bitterness of controversy, in the toil of state services, whether vindicating his private good name or standing forth to defend the English people, in favour, or in poverty and persecution—did he forget that the great business of his existence was to give utterance to the promptings of imagination. Poetry was his imperial theme,—the controlling and harmonizing idea of his life; and the aspirations of his inmost nature may be traced throughout all his writings, no matter how unpromising their topic. The art enters into his scheme of education, “not as,” he protests, “the prosody of a verse among the rudiments of grammar, but that sublime art which would soon show what despicable creatures our common rhymers and play-writers be; and what religious—what glorious and magnificent—use might be made of poetry, both in divine and human things.” It is impressive to hear the boy Milton, in his early verses, pleading with his father that poetry is a holy thing; and, again, to hear him in the prime of manhood, amid the stern words of one of his controversial publications, announcing that “the great achievements of poetry must rest on devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and seeds out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.” So sublime was Milton's conception of his chief calling, that no occasion of public moment is suffered to transcend it in his thoughts. When he addresses the Parliament,—that noted Parliament composed of such stern stuff as filled the breasts of Cromwell and Pym, and Hollis and Haslerig,—he is true to the laureate fraternity, and cites as

authority to that tribunal the imaginative lore of "our sage and serious poet Spenser." And when, nearly thirty years before its consummation, the idea of his "adventurous song" broke the bonds of silence, in anticipation that, at some distant day, "he might take up the harp and sing an elaborate song to generations,"—and when he spoke of being led by the genial power of nature to another task than his polemics, and of the inward promptings that, by labour and intense study, joined with the strong propensity of nature, he might, perhaps, leave something so written to after-times as "they should not willingly let die,"—all, not less than his immortal epic, show his deep belief that the highest aim of human intellect is poetry;—that the things "of highest hope and hardest attempting proposed by the mind in the spacious circuit of her musings" are to be wrought out by the imagination.

So far back as we are able to penetrate into Milton's early life, there may be discovered in his very boyhood traces of a consciousness that he was endowed with an imagination for which mighty works were in prospect;—an endowment recognised as a trust committed to him by his Creator, and therefore to be cherished sedulously, and held sacred from the pressure of outward circumstances changing the direction of his intellectual destiny. His whole existence was a preparation for the stupendous achievement of the "Paradise Lost." There was no precipitancy,—no rash forwardness of a youthful, misjudging ambition; but a reserve and dignity, in which the voice of his genius seemed to be whispering that his hour was not yet come. In studying this subject, I have been deeply impressed with a sense of the magnanimity to be traced in Milton's childhood,—the largeness of soul belonging to the little boy. And how does this appear? In various passages of his prose writings, as well as of his poetry, he has told the history of his mind almost as far back as his memory could travel, disclosing how the foundations of his genius were laid; and it is clear that, in those early years, the heaven-inspired endowment of a poet's spirit was there, with all the cravings of an imagination ontstripping its own creative powers. There was in Milton's young bosom a poet's heart, with aspirations after ideal grandeur and goodness and beauty, transcending its early strength, and therefore seeking its nourishment, not in crude and forced fruits of his own imagination, but in the majestic growth of the high poetry of all ages. The proof of the might of Milton's youthful genius was his silence;—the high-minded reserve of one who, keeping the hope of achievement in a distant day, knew that it ill became him to thrust forward the rash and unformed ambitions of boyhood. The vast idea of the functions of poetry which early took possession of him forbade

the thought that anything he could then produce could even approach the standard of his own conception. He felt that he must await his time, and was far too strong-minded to spend his efforts in juvenile effusions, and then to hang over them with the weak and self-enamoured delusion of an author's vanity. The glory of Milton's youth is not precocious poetry, but the self-sacrificing devotion of a student. Before the twelfth year of his life, the child's tender eyesight had received, from intense and midnight study, the first fatal injury which brought in its train the dark calamity of hopeless blindness. There is no period of Milton's long career more finely characteristic of his genius than when, in youth and early manhood, he may be imagined seated in silence at the feet of the great masters of song who had gone before him. It was their voices alone, and not the tender notes of his own, that could fill the large spaces of his heart. The noblest sounds of all poetry—whether of a remote antiquity or of a nearer day and of his own land—were perpetually sweeping over his spirit, not mingling with any utterance of his young imagination, but passing on into futurity on the wings of hope, to meet strains of equal glory, that were yet, in the far distance, to rise up in the poetry of the "Paradise Lost." It was in the sacred stream of Hebrew poetry that the youthful genius of Milton was baptized: it was the divine imagery of the Psalmist, the prophets, and of him who saw the Apocalypse, which deep-dyed the colour of his imagination. Nor did his mind, in the amazing activity of his youth, stop there, but, winging its flight over profane as well as sacred soil, held communion with all the remnant glory of classical poetry; and then, after having thus travelled into the ancient inspirations of Palestine, of Greece, and Rome, it dwelt, too, in spirit with the poets of modern Italy, and still more fervently with the great ones of his own England. The poetry of every age and of every land was breathing upon his soul, feeding and fanning the inward fire that was deeply burning there.

Of Milton's juvenile poems—which are composed mostly in Latin—the one which, perhaps, has chief interest is that addressed to his father; not so much because of any extraordinary poetic merit, as for its thoughtful strain of filial gratitude. Parental care over the course of a child's intellect was never more feelingly, more honourably acknowledged. Some few misgivings appear to have crossed the mind of Milton's father, that the bent of his genius might divert him from the useful pursuits of active life; but the uncalculating enthusiasm of the youth's larger spirit was solicitous, not so much to plead with his parent against such opinions, as to vindicate him from them—to persuade him that such thoughts did not in truth belong to one who had

so congenially cherished his child's imaginative studies. Cowper's translation of the poem may furnish one brief passage:—

“No! howsoe'er the semblance thou assume  
Of hate, thou hatest not the gentle Muse,  
My father! for thou never badest me tread  
The beaten path and broad that leads right on  
To opulence, nor didst condemn thy son  
To the insipid clamours of the bar,—  
To laws voluminous and ill-observed,—  
But, wishing to enrich me more, to fill  
My mind with treasure, led'st me far away  
From city din to deep retreats,—to banks  
And streams Aonian,—and with free consent  
Didst place me happy at Apollo's side.”

After Milton's childhood in London and his collegiate career of several years, in the discipline of which there appears to have been something at variance with his temperament, he came back in the prime of manhood to the home of his father's house. That home was now transferred from the thronged thoroughfares of the metropolis to the tranquil repose of a country residence. The seven cloistered years in the calm retreats of one of the ancient British universities were followed by five equally studious and happier years spent beneath his father's rural roof at Horton. This was probably the happiest period of his life; and when, in anticipation, I reflect how, at an advanced stage of his existence, his imagination gathered the vast accumulations of his erudition and made them all subservient to the purposes of poetry, I cannot but consider these rural years as among the most influential on his genius. There was shining upon him the light of the happy faces of both parents,—a father whose strong passion for music was inherited by the poet, a mother full of that goodness which, like the charitable deeds of the pious George Herbert, gave thoughts which proved music at midnight. The bright vision of an English landscape was ever before him; and still, year after year, was his mind travelling farther and farther into the limitless regions of poetic invention, imbuing his imagination with the spirit of all that was beautiful and sublime in Hebrew song and in classical and chivalrous poetry.

Amid all his acquirements, the one volume for ever foremost and uppermost in his thoughts was the Bible. In what I may call uninspired inspiration, his favourites were Homer and Pindar; and perhaps more than either was the drama of Euripides, “sad Electra's poet,” and Dante, Petrarch, and Tasso, and the three illustrious predecessors in his own language, with whom he was soon to take rank,—Chaucer,



Spenser, and Shakspeare. His studies roamed, too, through the shady spaces of Philosophy, catching from the divine volumes of the best of the Athenian schools that Platonic spirit which may be traced in much of the early English poetry, and stored his memory with all that history recorded, and not less with the lofty fables and romances which recount the deeds of knighthood. It was to those five tranquil happy years at Horton, beneath the unanxious shelter which the paternal roof alone can give, that the vast opulence of Milton's intellect was chiefly owing, —the rich amalgamation of poetry, sacred and profane, of theology, philosophy, history, fable, of science, in the severe and exact knowledge of abstractions, and in the fit harmonies of music. The important moral to be drawn from this part of Milton's life is, not that education can ever originate the natural endowment of a poet's genius, but how that gift of imagination, by study and meditative communion outward and inward, may be strengthened, enriched, and expanded; and how false is the notion that, when a poet speaks, he speaks as it were from some lawless, thoughtless, ungovernable frenzy.

The intensity of Milton's studies at his rural retreat appears to have been relieved by occasional visits to the metropolis, where he refreshed his spent spirits by witnessing the theatrical representations of the English drama, then so copiously supplied by the fresh and abundant growth in the times of Queen Elizabeth's and the first of the Stuarts' reigns. For two of the great English dramatic poets Milton's admiration is recorded in a well-known passage in one of his shorter poems, referring to Jouson's learned sock and the "native wood-notes wild" of Shakspeare. His visits to London and its theatres are mentioned in one of his Latin poems, in a few lines. I may quote to you from Cowper's English version, with the remark that it will be no forced fancy to apply the allusions at the close to the tragic fate of Romeo, and to Banquo's appalling presence in the banquet-scene in Macbeth:—

" If impassion'd Tragedy wield high  
The bloody sceptre, give her locks to fly  
Wild as the winds, and roll her haggard eye,  
I gaze, and grieve, still cherishing my grief.  
At times even bitter tears yield sweet relief;  
As when, from bliss untasted torn away,  
Some youth dies, hapless, on his bridal day;  
Or when the ghost, sent back from shades below,  
Fills the assassin's heart with vengeful woe."

During the period of the history of Milton's genius when dwelling at Horton, its silent unseen roots were sinking deeper and spreading wider,



to draw nourishment from the richest soil of ancient and modern literature. The mighty growth so stoutly rooted was at last beginning to utter sounds from its waving branches, and from the light leaves of its topmost boughs; the life which had been coursing invisibly in its channels burst forth in surpassing luxuriance of blossom and of flower. While Milton had practised such admirable reserve in early authorship, because he had "not completed to his mind the full circle of his private studies," still, he tells us himself that he felt, "by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what had emboldened other poets to their achievements might with the same diligence as they used embolden him." With all the early silence of his muse, his spirit was sustained in its high hopes by what he calls "his honest haughtiness and self-esteem of what he was or what he might be." The whole life of Milton was a life of principle, and not of impulse, or, rather, of principle controlling impulse. He was silent from a strong sense of duty,—the pious conviction that the talent committed to him was to be neither rashly squandered nor basely hid. The remonstrances of an affectionate friend caused, on one occasion, some misgivings as to the tardy movings of his genius,—“a certain belatedness,” as he called it,—a self-suspicion that he was suffering himself to dream away his years “in studious retirement, like Endymion with the moon;” but these misgivings and apprehensions vanished away with the reflection—the precept of his conscience—that the great power which God had intrusted to him—a poet’s creative imagination—was to be kept with a sacred reverence and religious advisement. It is in this thoughtful sense of responsibility that one of the earliest of his severely meditative sonnets is conceived:—

“How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
 Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!  
 My hasting days fly on with full career,  
 But my late spring no bud or blossom showeth.  
 Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth  
 That I to manhood am arrived so near,  
 And inward ripeness doth much less appear,  
 That some more timely-happy spirits endueth.  
 Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
 It shall be still in strictest measure, even  
 To that same lot, however mean or high,  
 Toward which Time leads me and the will of Heaven;  
 All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
 As ever in my great Taskmaster’s eye.”

The fruits of what I may call the rural period of Milton’s life were

those two descriptive lyrics, "L'Allegro" and "Penseroso," which are, perhaps, better known than the rest of his short poems, and which I shall not pause on longer than to say that their charm consists in a great measure in their true picturing of actual landscape, dappled at the same time with the sunshine of a poet's fancy,—presenting, by the harmonizing light of imagination, the ploughman in the furrowed field, the blithely-singing milkmaid, the mower whetting his scythe, the shepherd seated under the hawthorn, and such familiar rural objects, together with creatures of the fancy,—the cherub Contemplation soaring on golden wing, the mountain-nymphs and the wood-nymphs in their hallowed haunts, and all

"Such sights as youthful poets dream  
On summer eves by haunted stream."

Another poem of the same period is the monody "Lycidas," composed, it will be remembered, on the death by shipwreck of one of the poet's dearest friends, and on which was pronounced one of the most extraordinary of all the perverse, unimaginative, wrong-hearted, and wrong-minded critical judgments which Dr. Johnson apparently delighted in when dealing with Milton's poetry. It would consume more space than I can command to scrutinize that criticism; and, therefore, I must refrain from characterizing it as I think of it, because I might seem to express myself more strongly than I could make good against such authority. It is a poem which has not only won the hearty admiration of many a thoughtful, imaginative reader of poetry, but it has even been considered by more than one trustworthy critic (among them Hallam) as a good test of a real feeling for what is peculiarly called poetry. Yet Johnson had the hardihood to say of it,—after condemning its diction as harsh, its rhymes as uncertain, the numbers displeasing, and its want of feeling,—“In ‘Lycidas’ there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting, with a yet grosser fault,—its approach to impiety by the indecent mingling of trifling fictions with the most awful and sacred truths.” Who could have dreamed that so bitter a rebuke was levelled at the sublime passage in which, after sundry mythological personages, by an effort of imagination appealing to the sympathetic activity of the reader's imagination, the august form of St. Peter is introduced?—

“Last come, and last did go,  
The pilot of the Galilean lake :  
Two massy keys he bore, of metals twain  
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain).  
He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake.”

It would not, I think, be without interest to examine minutely Dr. Johnson's judgments upon this poem, and to trace them to a prejudiced and blind misapprehension of the higher aims of imagination,—a dogmatic obtuseness to the most magical spells of poetry. But too many of the poet's great works remain before me; and I can say no more on this point than that any one who desires to take home to his heart and to his intellect a just sense of the spirit of Milton's poetry, must look at it with other vision than the bleared eyes of that eminent writer who compiled the "English Dictionary."

The prime of Milton's manhood produced also the exquisite masque of "Comus." This form of dramatic composition, originally introduced from Italy, was long a favourite in England, and, being less restrained than the regular drama by rules, gave wider scope to poetical fancy. The severity of Milton's well-disciplined judgment was well fitted to check its tendency to fantastic extravagance; and there is probably no poem in the language better calculated to delight readers of almost all moods of poetic taste. It combines, in a very remarkable degree, a vivid energy of imagination, and an exuberance of all that is fanciful and beautiful in imagery and language, with a majesty of meditative philosophy diademed with the radiant glory of poetry. "Comus" presents not a few beautifully-reflected lights of Milton's poetic studies. You may discover, at times, echoes, as it were, of the sweet modulations of Shakspeare's sentences,—combinations of words we are half tempted to appropriate to some of his dramas; and, again, traces of the matchless spirituality of Spenser. In the lines,—

"Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon  
Were in the flat sea sunk; and Wisdom's self  
Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude;  
Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,  
She plumes her feathers and lets grow her wings,  
That, in the various bustle of resort,  
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd.  
He that has light within his own clear breast  
May sit in the centre, and enjoy bright day."—

We are here reminded of the Red-Cross Knight in the "Fairy Queen,"—his glittering armour making a little gleaming light in the den of Error, or of that image of surpassing beauty, surpassing Una's angel-face shining bright and making a sunshine in the shady place. One of the most beautiful passages in the poem of "Comus"—beautiful for the imaginative blending of spiritual and bodily emotions—is that in which the lady, wandering in the darkness of the forest and in the darkness

of her own benighted loneliness, beholds, in spirit, gleams from her unembodied guardians, Faith and Hope and Chastity, hovering round her footsteps, and at the same time, with her *bodily* sight, the dark cloud which had dimmed the sky brightening with sudden moonlight:—

“A thousand fantasies  
Begin to throng into my memory,  
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,  
And æry tongues that syllable men’s names  
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.  
These thoughts may startle well, but not astound  
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended  
By a strong-siding champion, Conscience.  
Oh, welcome, pure-eyed Faith; white-handed Hope,  
Thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings!  
And thou, unblemish’d form of Chastity!  
I see ye visibly, and now believe  
That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill  
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,  
Would send a glistening guardian, if need were,  
To keep my life and honour unassail’d.  
Was I deceived? or did a sable cloud  
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?  
I did not err: there does a sable cloud  
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,  
And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.”

The virtue of that passage should so have its home in every heart that the recollection of it may rise up and make the brightness of any dark but moon-touched cloud brighter to the eye, and brighter still to the imagination, as it floats along the sky, the image of that light which beams from heaven upon the heart of innocence.

Much that is prophetic of the great poem of his later years may be seen in the spiritual invention of this early poem,—the vision of bad and good angels, Comus and his brutish rabble, and the attendant spirit described in the opening lines,—one of

“Those immortal shapes  
Of bright ærial spirits . . . insphered  
In regions mild of calm and serene air,  
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot  
Which men call earth.”

I ought not to quit this exquisite poem without remarking how perfectly it illustrates the magic power of poetry to shed a glory on things which are lying in life’s daily prospect. Here is a poem of a thousand lines, radiant with fancy, full of spirits of the air, and fairy spells, and

the meditations of an imaginative philosophy. And what was the occasion of it? A simple accident in the family of the Earl of Bridgewater when keeping his court at Ludlow Castle. His daughter, the Lady Alice Egerton, and her two brothers, were benighted and lost their way in Haywood Forest; and the brothers, in attempting to explore their path, left their sister alone in a tract of country inhabited by a boorish peasantry. When the fair one's heart was throbbing in the lonely wood, how little could she have dreamed that a poet's words were to win for her brighter and more enduring honour than aught that wealth or heraldry could give!

But the most distinct foreshadowing of the immortal epic poem is given in a poem shorter and earlier than "Comus,"—the "Hymn on the Nativity." It has very much the sound of "Paradise Lost" set to a lyrical measure. When listening to the line closing one of the stanzas,—

"The wakeful tramp of doom must thunder through the deep,"—

I fancy I can hear it in the "Paradise Lost," composed some forty years after, reverberating after that lapse of years in a passage which is the very echo of it:—

"The thunder,  
Wing'd with red lightning and impetuous rage,  
Perhaps has spent his shafts, and ceases now  
To bellow through the vast and boundless deep."

The tranquil hours at Horton were drawing to a close. The happy household was broken by the death of the poet's mother. It is a trait of tenderness in the character of one whose character we are too apt to regard as all severity, that it was not until, to borrow the words of the Psalmist, "he went heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother," that the wish for foreign travel was indulged by Milton. Having, by the poems already mentioned, acquired reputation as a poet, in his thirtieth year he left England to travel to lands whose ancient glory was still hanging over the south of Europe. It would be interesting to follow him in imagination as he roamed through classic lands, a young enthusiast in the full flush of fresh poetic genius, the strength of admirable scholarship, and in the prime of manly beauty, with not a wrinkle by the cares which after a few years seamed his brows,—to stand with him in the presence of Grotius, then an ambassador to the court of France,—and, with still deeper interest, to accompany him at Florence, visiting Galileo old, a prisoner of the Inquisition, and fast sinking under his burdens into the grave. How must the young poet's heart, full as it ever was to overflowing with the passion for freedom,—the single-



spirited love of intellectual freedom and truth,—have throbbed in the visible presence of the victim of spiritual despotism! The moral dignity of this sad spectacle sank deep into Milton's imagination, to rise up again at another distant day to furnish a fit allusion in the description of the broad circumference of Satau's shield,—

“ Like the moon, whose orb  
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views  
At evening, from the top of Fesolè,  
Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,  
Rivers or mountains, in her spotty globe,”—

or to describe the seraph Raphael beholding from afar the earth,—

“ As when by night the glass  
Of Galileo, less assured, observes  
Imagined lands and regions in the moon.”

We follow him to Venice, and to Rome,—the city of more than twenty centuries,—and fancy him wrapt with classical associations, feeding his genius by gazing on sculptures and paintings of Michael Angelo and all the works of Italian Art. And with what feeling must that spirit of his, which seems to have chafed under any ecclesiastical discipline, have been stirred within the precincts of the papal metropolis! Standing in the shadow of the Vatican, by the side of that vast dominion stretching its thin spectral arms over the whole earth, how must this young Briton, this Protestant, this Independent, have scanned the visage of what one of his contemporaries,\* with an image of Miltonic energy, describe as “the ghost of the Roman empire seated on the ruins thereof!”

It was at Rome that Milton is supposed to have met and contracted a lifelong friendship with one of his fellow-countrymen, like himself a young traveller, a poet, and a republican,—the high-spirited and incorruptible Andrew Marvell. It has been well said that not even in the proudest days of her republic had Rome to boast two nobler youths than Milton and Marvell. The young poet proceeded onward to the south of Italy, and was welcomed beneath the hospitable roof of Manso, Marquis of Villa, the friend and biographer of Tasso. It was the very spot where the great Italian poet, a few years before, completed the “Jerusalem Delivered;” and it has been conjectured that there first dawned upon the thought of Milton the ambition of composing an epic poem in the English language. It seems to me more probable that this must have been among his more youthful aspirations. But, be that as it may, it was first announced in the Latin poem addressed to his

\* Hobbes.

venerable host on taking leave of him. I doubt not, that standing in the gardens overlooking the famed prospect of the bright Bay of Naples, a spot but lately honoured by the footsteps of Italy's last best poet, Milton heard the story of Tasso's romantic life—his imprisonment, his sorrows, and his madness—from the lips of Tasso's aged friend; and, though there was not in reserve for the British bard the dark destiny of the dungeon such as the Italian had been immured in, yet the story of the calamitous career of his fellow-poet must have been so impressed upon his feelings as to rise up in his thoughts in after-years, teaching the lesson of endurance beneath sorrows as heavy if not so intense.

Milton's intention of visiting Sicily and Greece was abandoned on learning that afflictions were gathering upon England; and he turned his steps homeward, stopping to visit the kinsfolk of one of the friends of his youth, at their mansion on the Alpine bank of the Lake of Geneva. He hastened back from the continent, because, said he, "I thought it base to be travelling for amusement abroad while my fellow-citizens were fighting for liberty at home." When he set foot again on British ground, the banner of civil war had been flung out to the breeze; for the grand Rebellion was begun.

I am dealing, let it be remembered, with the *poet* Milton. When I reflect how mighty and how many were his achievements in poetry,—how they are all complete,—none, like the "Canterbury Tales" and the "Fairy Queen," splendid fragments,—it seems almost incredible that nearly thirty years of his life were almost wholly turned aside from the great highway of his genius. And why was this? Was it because, with the growth of intellectual pride, he was learning to disparage his early aspirations? Was it that poetry had ceased to be that divine thing the love of which had once shone on all his paths? No! such heartless disloyalty never had place in his thoughts. He never forgot that he had an endowment the voice of which was meant to reach to distant ages and to other lands. But the age and the country in which his lot was cast had instant need of his powers. He beheld the people struggling for freedom; and his heart, with all its high-wrought enthusiasm, was with them. The monarchy had lost much that might make a subject proud. The high-minded nobility, which Milton might have honoured as Spenser had, was no longer in the same strong sympathy with the throne, at once gracing and fortifying it. The Buckhursts and the Cecls and the Egertons had gradually been thrust aside, and their places filled by worthless and profligate favourites,—minions like Carr and Villiers. The low and malignant influences which overshadowed the court of the

first of the Stuarts sealed the bloody fate of the second of that hapless dynasty. The civil war began with court corruption; and, in such a contest, where could the soul of Milton be but with the people? He turned aside from poetry reluctantly, but dutifully: he felt himself possessed of a power which fitted him to be the intellectual champion of the cause. For about a quarter of a century his muse was almost forsaken; and during this period his pen produced a succession of controversial writings on various subjects as powerful as ever were produced. When he first entered on this stern duty, it was with the avowed sense of inferiority to a strength already proved in poetry,—the better task which the genial power of nature prompted, having, as he said, the use, as it were, of only the left hand. I am inclined, however, to think that, as he prosecuted one controversy after another, the spirit of controversy got more largely possession of him,—polemic pride growing on him,—exultation at finding that he could deal blows so vigorous with his left hand.

Domestic troubles embittered his life. It is one of the miseries of civil war that it sows the seeds of household animosities. "It was a time," says Milton, in one of his prose works, "when man and wife were often the most inveterate foes; when the man often stayed at home to tend the children, while the mother of the family was busy in the camp of the enemy, threatening death and destruction to her husband." It was Milton's bad fortune to marry in such times,—a speedy match and a sorry marriage; for it mated a republican husband with a royalist spouse.

During these agitated years of Milton's life he never faltered in the duty he had marked out for himself; but still you could sometimes discover the longings of the poet's heart,—something showing that he knew how much more congenial than bandying vulgar and abusive epithets with Salmasius, or toiling in the secretaryship of the Council of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, would it be for him (to borrow one of his own glowing phrases) to be "soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and singing-ropes about him." Now and then the pent-up fire of his imagination bursts out in a strain of prose which is poetry in all but poetry's metrical music; in that sublime sentence, for instance, which tells how high were the expectations his enthusiasm had conceived of Republican England:—"Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle renewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam, purging and unsealing her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance."

During this middle period of Milton's life, when absorbed with political and theological polemics and state-affairs, the only sign given to show that poetry was not wholly suppressed in his thoughts is to be found in the few sonnets dated in those years, and which are distinguished for a sternness of conception and a compressed energy of style that we may fancy them written at Cromwell's council-board, and with the same pen which engrossed some stern despatch from the Protector to his fellow-sovereigns on the continent. The sonnets of Milton are few; but they rendered this important service:—that they enlarged the sphere of that form of verse, showing that it was not confined to amatory poetry; that it was fitted not only for the expression of tender emotions, but for the utterance of a statesmanly philosophy, dignified rebuke, the deep, Christian meditation, and whatever else belongs to poetry's grandest and most majestic tones. The strain which before had scarcely served more than a lover's uses was made the fit form for the stern Republican to address Cromwell and Fairfax and Sir Harry Vane. There is a contrast as wide as between the temperaments of the two poets between the sonnet of Spenser and the sonnet of Milton:—

“A glowworm Lamp,  
It cheer'd mild Spenser, call'd from Faery-land  
To struggle through dark ways; and, when a damp  
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand  
The thing became a Trumpet, whence he blew  
Soul-animating strains,—alas! too few!”

There is recorded in Boswell's Johnson one of the most ludicrous literary conversations touching Milton's sonnets—ludicrous from its solemn absurdity—to be met with amid all the absurdities of criticism. “Pray, sir,” said Miss Hannah More to Dr. Johnson, “how could a poet who wrote ‘Paradise Lost’ write such poor sonnets?” “Madam,” replied the critical autocrat, “Milton was a genius that could cut a colossus from a rock, but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones.” Miss Hannah More was as sensible as well as a very pious woman, but on this occasion, I very much fear, she asked a foolish question; and Dr. Johnson was a wise and a learned man, but I fear the folly of the question was contagious to the answer. If Hannah More had searched Johnson's Dictionary through, she could not have selected a more inappropriate epithet than in speaking of such *poor* sonnets as Milton's; and, as to his figure of the carved cherry-stones, let us look at one of these condemned productions. At the time when Milton was acting as the Latin Secretary of the government of Cromwell, there was given one of the highest proofs of the gigantic foreign policy for which the proud

Protector was most illustrious. The persecuted Protestants in the valleys of Piedmont appealed to him for succour; and the stern voice of Cromwell went forth to every potentate of Europe, bidding him know that he meant to make the cause of these suffering Christians his own:—

“When Alpine vales threw forth a suppliant cry,  
The majesty of England interposed,  
And the sword stopp'd; the bleeding wounds were closed,  
And faith preserved her ancient purity.”

The spokesman of Oliver Cromwell's will was John Milton; and there seems to be a tone of imagination in the very address of some of these despatches;—a Miltonic aggregation of vague geographical names;—“Oliver, Protector of the Commonwealth of England, to the Emperor of all Russia and all the Northern climes;” or to “the King of the Swedes, Goths, and Vandals;” calling to their remembrance how the valleys of Piedmont were besmeared with the blood and slaughter of the miserable victims, and the mountains filled with the houseless wanderers,—women and children perishing with hunger and cold and the sword of the persecutor. The spirit of Milton was so stirred by the sufferings of the Waldenses that he felt the need of more even than high-toned mandates to earthly monarchs; and therefore there went up from the depths of his poet's heart, in one of his mighty sonnets, the fervid imprecation:—

“Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones  
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;—  
E'en them who kept thy truth so pure of old,  
When all our fathers worshipp'd stocks and stones,  
Forget not: in thy book record their groans  
Who were thy sheep, and in their aucient fold  
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that roll'd  
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
To Heaven. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow  
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway  
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow  
A hundredfold, who, having learn'd thy way,  
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.”

After rehearsing this high and solemn strain of poetry, I can scarcely bring myself to remind you of the pitiful comparison of Dr. Johnson's which I hoped to refute by it.

All the visionary enthusiasm of Milton in the cause of political liberty was, as is well known, wholly defeated. We come now to the



last—the darkest and yet most glorious—portion of his life, divided as it may be into three chief eras:—as a student, as a statesman, and a solitary.

There are few finer themes for contemplation than the hermit old age of John Milton. “My mind,” said Coleridge, “is not capable of forming a more august conception than arises from the contemplation of this great man in his latter days. Poor, sick, old, blind, slandered, persecuted,—in an age in which he was as little understood by the party *for* whom, as by that *against* whom he had contended,—and among men before whom he strode so far as to dwarf himself by the distance,—yet still listening to the music of his own thoughts, or, if additionally cheered, yet cheered only by the prophetic faith of two or three solitary individuals, he did nevertheless

“Argue not  
Against Heaven’s hand or will, nor bate a jot  
Of heart or hope; but still bore up, and steer’d  
Right onward.”

Wordsworth, too, has told of its moral sublimity:—

“One there is who builds immortal lays,  
Though doom’d to tread in solitary ways,  
Darkness before, and Danger’s voice behind!  
Yet not alone, nor helpless to repel  
Sad thoughts; for, from above the starry sphere  
Come secrets whisper’d nightly to his ear;  
And the pure spirit of celestial light  
Shines through his soul, that he may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.”

I have followed the progress of Milton’s genius, dwelling on some of his neglected pieces, till but scant space is left for thought on his great poem. The gradual ascent to the highest point of his fame being accomplished, no more can now be done than to take a brief prospect from the pinnacle of this holy mount. The “Paradise Lost” was given to the world in 1667, the author being then on the verge of sixty years. I cannot bring myself to believe for one moment that he had ever relinquished his early ambition of an English epic poem; but it is probable that the work was not begun till the restoration of the monarchy threw the Republican back into meditative solitude, and closed the anxieties of his long and embittered disputations. I shall not be so presumptuous as to enter now on any even general criticism of so elaborate a poem. The hurried comment I might at present make would be but a poor substitute for the ample criticism which should be devoted to such a theme: its sublimity, its beauty, are familiar to all.

But grievous injustice is done to the poem by reading detached portions of it; for perhaps above all other epic poems it is admirable for the composition of it:—I mean its entire structure, and the order and succession of its parts. It combines in this respect the dramatic with the epic spirit; and I find myself always impressed by it as by the person of a tragedy, which, indeed, was the form originally contemplated by Milton. It is a poem demanding from its reader the most strenuous activity of a reader's imagination; otherwise he will find himself left immeasurably below the range of its inventions. For instance: in the wondrous imaginations of Satan's voyage,—first exploring his way on swift wings, one while sinking into the deep, and then rising to the fiery concave,—still within his own vast realms of Pandemonium;—after he has passed hell's gates, standing with awe and looking into the wild abyss before venturing to pass the dark pavilion of Chaos;—then, springing upward like a pyramid of fire and reaching the utmost orb of the regions of light, the fiend weighs his spread wings to behold afar off the empyreal heaven:—

“And, fast by, hanging in a golden chain,  
This pendent world, in bigness as a star  
Of smallest magnitude close by the moon.”

Now, in this the imagination is apt to falter and supply the thought that by “this pendent world” is meant this one little planet of ours,—the earth. But Milton's imagination knew no such circumscription; and his conception was—not the earth, not even the space filled by the sun, with all its planets and their satellites, but—the vast orb of myriads of suns, the measureless space of countless solar systems; and all this was meant when the arch fiend was gazing at

“This pendent world, in bigness as a star  
Of smallest magnitude close by the moon.”

Again: what a transcendent effort is that by which, in recounting the hosts of Pandemonium, the poet's imagination, grasping the whole mythology of classical antiquity, thrusts it with all its glory down into hell, and ranges the gods of Greece—Olympic Jove himself—with the inferior powers of the apostate angels! In an early lecture of this course, when attempting to portray the faculty of imagination, I claimed for it the power of either giving dignity and beauty to life's daily and common events, or, rising higher, of beholding, as an angel might, this earth, with its dark sea, with all that is vile upon its surface, and with the nations of the dead mouldering beneath, yet a star glittering in the firmament and peopled with beings redeemed for immortality. I recur to the thought because the poetic inventions of Milton are authoritative

—to show that I was indulging in no irrational rhapsody. Behold, for instance, how he has enveloped in a radiant glory the common incident which was the groundwork of “Comus.” And, in “Paradise Lost,” how the angels speak as if their words came indeed from an angel’s heart!—they tell of things as if seen with an angel’s vision. When Raphael, the sociable spirit, rises from his conference with Adam, it is because to his eye

“The parting sun,  
Beyond the earth’s green cape and verdant isles  
Hesperian, sets,—my signal to depart.”

And when he cautions our first parents to be lowly wise, observe how he speaks of the earth as if he had beheld it looking from some other sphere, when he bids Adam not to seek to know

“Whether the sun, predominant in heaven,  
Rise on the earth, or earth rise on the sun ;—  
He from the east his flaming road begin,  
Or she from west her silent course advance  
With inoffensive pace, that, spinning, sleeps  
On her soft axle, while she paces even  
And bears thee soft with the smooth air along.”

But no product of the Miltonic imagination needs deeper study than the character of Satan, the chief fiend, wrapt in the twilight of original brightness in dim eclipse, a lurid glory giving him a grandeur such as poetry had never created before; for it was the image of no less than “archangel ruined,” whose “face deep scars of thunder had intrenched.” It was an embodiment of poetic sublimity—a might of endurance, of boldness, and of pride—which awes the imagination, and, at times, wildly stirs, not a sympathy, but some sort of feeling for the ruined angelic splendour. How can we repress some such emotion at that passage where, standing on the beach of the inflamed sea, and rising to his full height with monarchal pride, Satan summons the entranced legions?—a passage demonstrating, too, the wondrous opulence of Milton’s imagination, pouring out one illustration after another as they rise up in his mind with the recollection of his Italian travels and of his classical and Biblical learning, a profusion of thick-sown similitudes,—the leaf-strewn brooks of Vallombrosa, the scattered sedge of the Red Sea vexed by the stormy Orion and the floating carcasses of Pharaoh’s horsemen :—

“On the beach  
Of that inflaméd sea he stood, and call’d  
His legions,—angel-forms, who lay entranced,  
Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks  
In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades

High overarch'd embower ; or scatter'd sedge  
 Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion arm'd  
 Hath vex'd the Red Sea coast, whose waves o'erthrew  
 Busiris and his Memphian chivalry,  
 While with perfidious hatred they pursued  
 The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld  
 From the safe shore their floating careasses  
 And broken chariot-wheels ; so thick bestrown,  
 Abjeet and lost, lay these, covering the flood,  
 Under amazement of their hideous change.  
 He call'd so loud, that all the hollow deep  
 Of Hell resounded."

This burst of what may be called the *material* sublime—arising from the grandeur of space and sound, things of sense—is followed soon by a burst of the *moral* sublime ; for, when the myriads of immortal spirits thronged around their chief, and the peerage of Pandemonium stood mute in expectation of Satan's voice,—

"Thrice he assay'd, and thrice, in spite of scorn,  
 Tears, such as angels weep, burst forth."

It is an observation of Coleridge's that it is very remarkable that in no part of his writings does Milton take any notice of the great painters of Italy, nor, indeed, of painting as an art ; while every other page breathes his love and taste for music ; and that, in the "Paradise Lost," Adam beuding over the sleeping Eve was the only proper *picture* he remembered. This criticism was made in forgetfulness of one of the most *picturesque* passages in that or any poem,—Adam hearing the first report of Eve's transgression. It will be remembered that

"Adam the while,  
 Waiting desirous her return, had wove  
 Of choicest flowers a garland, to adorn  
 Her tresses, and her rural labours crown,  
 As reapers oft are wont their harvest-queen.  
 Great joy he promised to his thoughts, and new  
 Solace in her return, so long delay'd ;  
 Yet oft his heart, divine of something ill,  
 Misgave him ; he the faltering measure felt,  
 And forth to meet her went, the way she took  
 That morn when first they parted."

The tragic tale of the unresisted temptation is soon told :—

"Adam, soon as he heard  
 The fatal trespass done by Eve, amazed,  
 Astonied stood and blank, while horror chill  
 Ran through his veins and all his joints relax'd

From his sleek hand the garland wreath'd for Eve  
Down dropp'd, and all the faded roses shed.  
Speechless he stood, and pale."

It should not be overlooked how far the subject of our English epic transcends that of all others. In comparison, how does the Trojan war, the wanderings of Ulysses, of Æneas, or the argument of either of the great Christian epics of modern Italy, dwindle by the side ! The "Paradise Lost" is the story of the deepest tragedy this earth has ever known,—the tragedy which has caused all other tragedies. While there have been flashing over it the sullen fires from the dark abodes of the rebel angels and from the presence of Satan, there is shed on the catastrophe a soft, pathetic light, giving to the poem that sweet and gentle ending which, familiar though it be, rather would I pass by, as I am doing, a thousand other things than it. The angry contentions of this unhappy pair had passed away ; love, which had fled with their innocence, came back with their submissive repentance. God in his mercy sent an angel to speak hope to the crushed spirit of Adam. He sent a happy dream to give hope to the heart of Eve. The two whom sympathy of happiness had united were now one in the sympathy of sorrow. Mercifully they were led forth at the *eastern* gate ; so that when hand in hand they wandered solitary, no longer blessed with the visible presence of God or his angels, their tear-dimmed eyes might turn to the Orient, where the far-off light of the promised redemption was rising on their darkened hearts :—when, the cherubim descending to their station, and the brandished sword of God blazing fierce as a comet,—

"In either hand the hastening angel caught  
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate  
Led them direct, and down the eliff as first  
To the subjected plain ; then disappear'd.  
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
Waved over by that flaming brand ; the gate  
With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms.  
Some natural tears they dropp'd, but wiped them soon.  
The world was all before them where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide ;  
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way."

Of Milton's later poem—the "Paradise Regained"—I have space but for one remark. It has never attained its just fame, because it is for ever forced into irrational comparison with the "Paradise Lost." It is essentially different in its whole character, for the simplest of all



reasons,—its adaptation to the nature of its subject; a difference analogous, as has been remarked, to that between the style of the Old and New Testaments. The poem is entitled to a judgment by a positive standard, and thus only can justice be rendered to its admirable meditative imagination. There is a tradition that the poet himself always denied its inferiority to the “Paradise Lost.” I am strongly inclined to think that this meant that he resented what he knew was a senseless comparison of two poems intrinsically different. The “Paradise Regained” gives no sanction to the opinion that it betrays a failure of the author’s genius. It was an appropriation of his powers to a new and different kind of poetic creation.

The last of his poems was the “Samson Agonistes,”—an English drama in the severest classical form of the Greek tragedy. The student of Milton’s poetry will read it with enthusiasm, were it only for its shadowing forth the author’s own fortunes,—his dearest hopes betrayed, and left, old and blind, among enemies. The poet was a man to bow without repining to his Maker’s will, dark as that will might be; and I cannot help thinking that this tragic drama was an invention for him to relieve his overcharged heart,—to utter complaints,—to say more bitter things with the tongue of Samson than with his own. We can fancy it the voice of John Milton when the once indomitable but now captive Israelite breaks forth in that piteous and withal majestic utterance of a blind man’s agony:—

“ Oh, dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse,  
Without all hope of day!  
‘ Let there be light, and light was over all.’  
Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?  
The sun to me is dark  
And silent as the moon,  
When she deserts the night,  
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.”

In the early part of this lecture I spoke of what had struck me as the magnanimity of Milton’s boyhood. That magnanimity had grown with the labours and afflictions of his eventful life; and the parting thought I have of this great poet finds expression in the last words of his last poem:—that he was one whom God

“ With peace and consolation hath dismiss’d,  
And calm of mind, all passion spent ”

## LECTURE VII.

### *Minor Poetry of the Seventeenth Century.*

CHARACTER OF THE TRANSITION FROM MILTON TO DRYDEN—THE RANK OF DRYDEN AMONG THE POETS—ENGLISH IMAGINATION IN HIS AGE—INFLUENCE OF MILTON'S GENIUS UPON HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND SUCCESSORS—WORDS-WORTH'S APOSTROPHE TO MILTON—DECLINE OF IMAGINATIVE ENERGY—METAPHYSICAL POETRY—DANIEL AND DRAYTON—DRAYTON'S POLYOLBION—LAMB'S NOTICE OF THIS POEM—DONNE AND COWLEY—THE SIN OF THIS SCHOOL OF POETRY—POETRY A SUBJECT FOR STUDIOUS THOUGHTFULNESS—DONNE'S "LECTURE"—CHARACTER OF COWLEY'S GENIUS—HIS PROSE ESSAYS—"THE COMPLAINT"—THE CONCEITS OF THE POETRY OF THIS PERIOD—HERBERT'S LINES ON VIRTUE; LIFE; PEACE—HERBERT'S SELF-CRITICISM—SACRED POETRY OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—ROBERT HERRICK—HIS LITANY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT—THE MUSIC OF HIS VERSE—LITERARY INTEREST OF THE CIVIL WAR—LORD CHATHAM ON THE CHARACTER OF THIS STRUGGLE—THE PURITAN SYSTEM ADVERSE TO POETIC CULTURE—RICHARD LOVELACE—"TO ALTHEA, FROM PRISON"—GEORGE WITHER—HIS CHARACTER—HIS ADDRESS TO HIS MUSE—A TRIBUTE TO WITHER'S MEMORY.

IN tracing the progress of English Poetry thus far, there has been no occasion for doubt in selecting the poets who may justly be deemed its representatives in different eras. The light of poetic inspiration first held on high by old Chaucer was given in succession to the giant hands of Spenser, of Shakspeare, and of Milton,—men of such might that no one ventures to question the supremacy of any of them in his own age. We have moved on, turning over the annals of a dynasty of noble poets,—the noblest of their kind. Preserving the historical character of these lectures, I pass from the name of Milton to that of Dryden. But this is a transition not to be made without pausing to reflect on the changes that at that period were beginning to pass over the spirit of the English Muse. The transition is a transition of descent: it will bring us down into a lower region. We have been dwelling among the mountains, and have caught the voice of poetry carried on from one lofty peak to another; and, after listening to the solemn strains of the "Paradise Lost" echoing in the upper air, we hear the next sound, far away, rising up in the lowlands. Is it then at all surprising that I am approaching this period of English poetry with reluctance? I find I am making excuses to myself for lingering a while longer in the high and pure atmosphere,—a sunny region full of life,—

when the path I must follow leads precipitately down into a valley not wholly free from unwholesome shades and fogs obscuring the placid canopy of the blue sky.

The most indulgent criticism appropriates to Dryden no higher station than the first rank among the secondary English poets. His period is the last thirty years of the seventeenth century. The character of the literature was undergoing a great change. The spirit of the nation, too, was changing; and its poetry especially betrayed sympathy and suffering with the change, for it was losing much of its distinctive character. Public opinion and feeling were, by the operation of causes remaining to be noticed, abased and corrupted; and poetry did not escape the contagion. The high moral tone of the Muse of the great earlier poets was lowered; and English imagination, parting with a portion of its native strength and simplicity, became at once a meaner and more mechanical thing. The change was not a sudden one; at least there had been indications of it at a much earlier period; and I propose, therefore, before closing the examination of the poetry of the seventeenth century with Dryden, to glance over the previous portions of that century, for the purpose of ascertaining what were the various manifestations of its literature, and especially those tending to form its fashion, at the close of that age. In this it will be necessary to notice some of the poets whom I passed by when I entered on the subject of my last lecture. It will be perceived that I am taking the liberty of deviating a little from the original prospectus of the course, in devoting one lecture (the present) to the minor poetry of the seventeenth century; it being my intention to appropriate the next lecture to the poetry of both Dryden and Pope, the times of the Restoration and of Queen Anne.

In taking a retrospect of the literary character and influence of any age, it is necessary to guard against falling into the error of supposing that an author whose fame has been realized by posterity possessed equal repute and authority in his own day. I selected, for instance, without hesitation, Milton, as the great poet of the middle of the seventeenth century; and yet the poetry of Milton was far from being the influential—the dominant—poetry of those times. Smaller stars were in the ascendant. When we come, therefore, to the transition from Milton to Dryden, the poetry of the latter differs so essentially from the former that one would be at fault in comprehending the change in so short a space of time, unless we turn to other poetry to discover in it some intimations of the poetic style with which the century closed. If

the genius of Milton had early gained the same hold it has since acquired over the thoughtful admiration of later times, English poetry never could have assumed so readily the guise it wore in the years immediately subsequent to the "Paradise Lost." It seems strange, but, I believe, correct, when I say that I can discover no influence exerted by the great productions of Milton upon the character of his poetical contemporaries or immediate successors. Indeed, he lived and died with as little congeniality manifested by the world as ever served to sustain the heart of genius. Happily for the world of all ages, that heart had a better-sustaining power, in the sense of its own majesty, and its trust upon heavenly guardianship. Excepting a few true friends, such as the Republican poet Marvell and the kind-hearted Ellwood (a name which may be dear not only to his own Society of Friends, but to all that speak the English tongue, were it only for the happy prompting of the idea of "Paradise Regained"),—with the exception of a few like these, Milton earned no sympathies for the Muse of his later years,—the great years of his poetic career. His spirit was aloof from all their modes of thought and feeling; and, thus contemplating him, has Wordsworth finely apostrophized his illustrious predecessor, Milton:—

‘Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free:  
So didst thou travel on life's common way  
In cheerful godliness, and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.”

The literary period of Dryden and those amidst whom he was pre-eminent was in no respect, that I can perceive, affected by the best poetry which had gone before. The current of poetry the public taste was floating on was like the slow—the regulated and artificial—stream of a canal; while at the same time, close beside it, the mighty river of Milton's genius was flowing at his own sweet will, copiously, impetuously, majestically, in its native channel and with its native tides. What were the poetic authorities where Milton's influence was unavailing—I shall endeavour to ascertain in this and the next lecture.

Before doing so, it will be necessary to discover the agencies which in the earlier part of the century had begun to give a direction to English poetry. The poetry which we have been contemplating in the previous lectures was eminently and gloriously imaginative. In all that proceeded from Spenser and Shakspeare and Milton, it was obvious that the controlling faculty was imagination; it was pure and high

poetry,—the product of the great characteristic of poetic genius,—that combination of fancy, judgment, meditation, and invention, which together constitute imagination in its most comprehensive form, and whose prime glory is its perpetual truth to nature. The great change that came over English poetry was the departure from nature, and the decline of *imaginative* energy.

The English nation, under the stirring influences of the Reformation, had become a deeply-thinking, reflective, and learned people. A philosophical condition of opinion prevailed; and, while those who combined with it an imaginative cast of mind would find all their hearts could desire on the pages of the great poets,—food for meditation and food for imagination in the storehouses of Spenser and Shakspeare,—there was another order of minds, to whom was supplied a poetry more congenial, for it showed an increased activity of the *reasoning* faculties and a diminished vigour of imagination. From this condition of public taste arose two schools of poetry. The first and best of these the *philosophical poetry*, as it has been styled, because it brought within the territory of poetry subjects usually left to the analytical processes of the understanding; such, for instance, as the immortality of the soul and its various functions. The second of these schools is that which has obtained inappropriately the title of the *metaphysical poetry*;—inappropriately, because no one has yet discovered why it should be so called, and also because the epithet would aptly belong to the other species of poetry, called, somewhat ambiguously, the philosophical. In both of these, those qualities which are deemed the essential elements of poetical composition are either placed on a level with or made subordinate to other qualities of the mind. I have no wish to adopt so strict a creed as wholly to exclude argumentative poetry; but it is proper to appreciate that it can never be elevated to the high order of inspiration, because it is addressed not to the imagination, or even to the fancy or the heart, but to the understanding.

There are two poets of the early part of the seventeenth century whom I cannot find in my heart to pass by in absolute silence—contemporaries of Spenser and Shakspeare,—Daniel and Drayton. The poems of the former are distinguished both for a purity and naturalness of diction and a tenderness of feeling and elevated thought which give them a high value. In the whole catalogue of English poets there is no one more right-minded, more right-hearted, than Samuel Daniel. The moral tone of his genius may be illustrated in such a passage as this description of what he calls “the concord of a well-tuned mind:”—



“He that of such a height hath built his mind,  
 And rear’d the dwelling of his thoughts so strong,  
 As neither fear nor hope can shake the frame  
 Of his resolv’d powers, nor all the wind  
 Of vanity or malice piece to wrong  
 His settled peace, or to disturb the same,—  
 What a fair seat hath he, from whence he may  
 The boundless wastes and wilds of man survey!

“And with how free an eye doth he look down  
 Upon these lower regions of turmoil!  
 Where all the storms of passion mainly beat  
 On flesh and blood; where honour, power, renown,  
 Are only gay afflictions, golden toil;  
 Where greatness stands upon as feeble feet  
 As frailty doth, and only great doth seem  
 To little minds who do it so esteem.

\* \* \* \*

“And while distraught ambition compasses  
 And is encompass’d,—whilst as craft deceives  
 And is deceived,—whilst man doth ransuchen \* man,  
 And builds on blood, and rises by distress,  
 And the inheritance of desolation leaves  
 To great-expecting hopes,—he looks thereon,  
 As from the shore of peace, with unwet eye,  
 And bears no venture in impiety;

“Knowing the heart of man is set to be  
 The centre of this world, about the which  
 These revolutions of disturbances  
 Still roll; where all the aspects of misery  
 Predominate; whose strong effects are such  
 As he must bear, being powerless to redress;  
 And that unless above himself he can  
 Erect himself,—how poor a thing is man!”

I can stop to notice only one other passage, having a double interest, as expressing his thoughtful pride in the power of the English language, and as prophetic of the spread of that language over the vast regions of America:—

“Should we, carcless, come behind the rest  
 In power of words, that go before in worth,  
 When as our accents, equal to the best,  
 Is able greater wonders to bring forth?  
 When all that ever hotter spirits express’d  
 Comes better’d by the patience of the North?”

And who (in time) knows whither we may vent  
 The treasure of our tongue ?—to what strange shores  
 This gain of our best glory shall be sent,  
 T' enrich unknowing nations with our stores ?—  
 What worlds in the yet unforméd Occident  
 May come refined with the accents that are ours ?”

The other poet I have alluded to—Michael Drayton—deserves a better fame than the world has given him, were it to rest only on his most elaborate work,—the “Polyolbion,”—the most extraordinary production, in some respects, that ever issued from poetic imagination. It was the first, and probably will be the last, topographical poem on the records of poetry. He is the panegyrist of his native country, the main subject of his poem being the rivers of England; and, as Charles Lamb has said of him, “he has gone over the soil with the fidelity of a herald and the painful love of a son; he has not left a rivulet, so narrow that it may be stepped over, without honourable mention, and has animated hills and streams with life and passion above the dreams of old mythology.” The poem, which is one of the longest in the language, is composed in the rarely-used verse of twelve syllables known by the name of “Alexandrine,” and, while combining a most elaborate accumulation of historic, legendary, and fabulous tradition, is distinguished for a higher strain of imagination than might at first be expected from a theme so unpromising for the purposes of poetry as topography. But it should be remembered that with the rivers of a country a thousand associations—actual and mythical—are for ever flowing. At the mere mention of such names as the Jordan, the Nile, the Tiber, the Rhine, the Thames, the Tweed, or the mournful Yarrow, or the history-honoured, blood-stained waters of our own land, how do thoughts and feelings rise up in our minds as unceasing as their springs! Among these early poets there are few to whose neglected memory the student will feel, on acquaintance, more disposed to render affectionate and dutiful homage than Michael Drayton; and let us part with him, holding in our recollections one of his smaller pieces, which would bear comparison with the best of that species of poetry in which there has been so much of worthless effusion;—I mean amatory poetry;—for, from Anacreon down to Moore, I know of no lines on the old subject of lovers’ quarrels, distinguished for equal tenderness of sentiment and richness of fancy. Especially may be observed the exquisite gracefulness in the transition from the familiar tone in the first part of the sonnet to the deeper feeling and the higher strain of imagination at the close:—

“ Since there ’s no help, come, let us kiss and part.

Nay, I have done : you get no more of me ;  
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,  
That thus so cleanly I myself can free !

Shake hands for ever ; cancel all our vows ;

And, when we meet at any time again,

Be it not seen in either of our brows

That we one jot of former love retain.

*Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,*

*When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,*

*When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death*

*And Innocence is closing up his eyes,*

*Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,*

*From death to life thou might'st him yet recover.”*

While Daniel and Drayton preserved in their poetry—if not in high elevation, at least in just proportions—the various elements of thought and feeling and fancy, the early and middle parts of the seventeenth century produced two other poets whose influence was wider and more abiding. It is usual to regard Donne, the Dean of St. Paul's, as the first, and Cowley as the chief, of the metaphysical poets, as they have been styled. The irredeemable sin of this school of poetry was its sacrifice of nature, and, consequently, of poetic truth. The rule of its inspiration was abandonment of simplicity. Natural imagery, natural feeling, and passion,—natural expression,—all were insufficient to reach the standard-mark of its extravagance. It was deemed the perfection of poetry so to entangle every poetic image or impulse in a maze of scholastic allusions, in forced and arbitrary turns of thought, paradoxes, antitheses, quaintnesses, subtleties, that the reader's chief pleasure must have been the exercise of a correspondent and inappropriate ingenuity in discovering the path of the labyrinth. It could have been no more than the negative satisfaction in unravelling a riddle. Still, to readers of acutely-intellectual habits of mind, the exercise of reading this poetry, we can readily understand, brought a certain kind and a considerable amount of mental satisfaction, which became a substitute for the imaginative delight imparted by true poetry, and perhaps mistaken for it. The feeling was much more akin to a mathematician's pleasure in some achievement in his severe abstractions, or to that of an adroit chess-player. Let me not for one moment be understood as condemning this poetry because it demands thought ; for, if there be any one principle I am more anxious to inculcate than another in this course of lectures, it is that all the highest and purest poetry can be appreciated only by studi-

ous and imaginative thoughtfulness. It is this error which greatly is the cause of false and low tastes in poetry. I have not treated, in the previous lectures, of any one poet whose genius can be approached otherwise than with due meditation. But the poetry I am now speaking of demands not so much thought as shrewdness, acuteness, ingenuity, intellectual dexterity; or perhaps it would describe it more justly, as well as more favourably, to say that it demands thought and nothing but thought,—no imagination, no passion, which are the life of real poetry. I might, for instance, select many pieces of this poetry, and before I had reached a dozen lines I should have perplexed and bewildered both you and myself. It may safely be said to be a poetry which makes it necessary for the reader to have, to use the familiar phrase, his wits about him. A short piece of Donne's, entitled "A Lecture," is as favourable a specimen as I can cite to characterize both his merits and his faults. This species of poetry prevailed for so considerable a time, and had such influence, that, in a course on English poetry, it cannot well be passed by. It is, however, only a very small amount of it I shall ask your endurance of:—

"Stand still, and I will read to thee  
A lecture, love, in Love's philosophy.  
These three hours that we have spent  
Walking here, two shadows went  
Along with us, which we ourselves produced.  
But, now the sun is just above our head,  
We do those shadows tread,  
And to brave clearness all things are reduced.  
So, whilst our infant loves did grow,  
Disguises did, and shadows, flow  
From us, and from our eares: now, 't is not so  
That love hath not attain'd the highest degree  
Which is still diligent lest others see;  
Except our loves at this noon stay,  
We shall new shadows make the other way.  
The morning shadows wear away;  
But these grow larger all the day."

On this quaint piece of poetry I have no other comment to make than to say that a courtship must have been an exceedingly formidable business when the wooing was done in this style. It was the remark of one of the philosophical poets of the seventeenth century, in allusion to the copiousness of his fancy, that he was forced to cut his way through a crowd of thoughts as through a wood. The remark applies to all of them. That school of poetry laboured under a very unusual difficulty,—an excess of intellectual activity; for the more frequent peril of poetry

is that its metrical music is too often made to conceal an emptiness of thought; and so it is that rhyme is sometimes taken as the antithesis of reason. These poets under consideration arrayed not only the thoughts which their strong intellect and large scholarship naturally suggested, but ingenuity was tortured to gather from all quarters all possible devices. Their poems abound with conceits wonderfully far-fetched, often worth little after all. In short, the poetry was fantastic instead of imaginative. It is instructive, however, sometimes to find nature breaking through the throng of these inventions; some strong passion bursting the bonds of a false taste,—false both in conception and expression,—and finding utterance in hearty simplicity of speech.

Of the ability of so fantastic a poet as Donne to express a simple thought in simple words, I cannot give better proof than the two admirable lines quoted in a former lecture, of his epitaph on Shakspeare :—

“ Under this curléd marble of thine own,  
Sleep, rare tragedian, Shakspeare, sleep alone ! ”

The chief representative of this poetry was Cowley,—a man, however, of poetic genius, with a poet's mind and a poet's sensibility, sadly as he was shackled by the influence of a false, and of course temporary, fashion. He was the contemporary of Milton, and far more prosperous in a speedy popularity,—the poet of the Royalists, as Milton was of the Republicans. That quick success was gained at the cost of an enduring and higher fame; and it is impossible to read the poetry of Cowley without mourning over the sacrifice. No cultivation, it is true, could have made him one of the greatest poets; but it might have made him much greater than he was. From childhood he had a poet's heart. In one of his admirable prose essays,—admirable for a native simplicity greatly contrasted with the overwrought fancy of his verse,—he says, “ I remember, when I began to read and to take some pleasure in it, there was wont to lie in my mother's parlour (I know not by what accident, for she herself never in her life read any book but of devotion); —but there was wont to lie Spenser's works. This I happened to fall upon, and was infinitely delighted with the stories of the knights and giants and monsters and brave houses which I found everywhere there (though my understanding had little to do with all this), and, by degrees, with the tinkling of the rhyme and dance of the numbers; so that, I think, I had read him all over before I was twelve years old, and was thus made a poet in childhood.” It would have been well for Cowley if his *understanding* had not had quite so much to do with his own poetry, and his imagination and native feeling more. He was involved in the turmoil of the civil war, not to come out of it, like his



mighty contemporary, Milton, with powers invigorated by the strife, and ready to gather them for the composition of an immortal poem, but rather to lament over the loss of congenial pursuits, and self-sacrifice in a thankless cause. His loyalty was rewarded by a heartless monarch's ingratitude; and one of the best of Cowley's poems is that entitled "The Complaint," composed when shades were gathering over the evening of his days:—

"In a deep vision's intellectual scene,  
Beneath a bower for sorrows made,—  
The uncomfortable shade  
Of the black yew's unlucky green  
Mix'd with the mourning willow's careful gray  
Where reverend Cam cuts out his famous way,  
The melancholy Cowley lay;  
And lo! a Muse appear'd to 's closéd sight  
(The Muses oft in lands of vision play),  
Bodied, array'd, and seen by an internal light.  
A golden harp with silver strings she bore;  
A wondrous hieroglyphic robe she wore,  
In which all colours and all figures were  
That nature or that fancy can create,  
That art can never imitate.

\* \* \* \* \*  
She touch'd him with her harp and raised him from the ground.  
The shaken strings melodiously resound.

'Art though return'd at last,' said she,  
'To this forsaken place and me?  
Thou prodigal, who didst so loosely waste  
Of all thy youthful years the good estate;  
Art thou return'd here, to repent too late,  
And gather husks of learning up at last,  
Now the rich harvest-time of life is past,  
And winter marches on so fast?

\* \* \* \* \*  
When I resolv'd to exalt thy anointed name  
Among the spiritual lords of peaceful fame,  
Thou changeling! thou, bewitch'd with noise and show,  
Wouldst into courts and cities from me go;  
Wouldst see the world abroad, and have a share  
In all the follies and the tumults there.  
Thou wouldst, forsooth, be something in a state;  
And business thou wouldst find and wouldst create.

'Go, renegado, cast up thy account;  
And see to what amount  
Thy foolish gains by quitting me:—  
The sale of knowledge, fame, and liberty,

The fruits of thy unlearn'd apostasy.  
 Thou thought'st, if once the public storm were past,  
 All thy remaining life should sunshine be :  
 Behold ! the public storm is spent at last ;  
 The sovereign 's toss'd at sea no more ;  
 And thou, with all the noble company,  
     Art got at last to shore.

But, whilst thy fellow-voyagers I see  
 All march'd up to possess the promised land,  
 Thou, still alone, alas ! dost gaping stand  
 Upon the naked beach, upon the barren sand.'

" Thus spake the Muse, and spake it with a smile  
 That seem'd at once to pity and revile.

And to her thus, raising his thoughtful head,

    The melancholy Cowley said,

    ' Ah, wanton foe ! dost thou upbraid

    The ills which thou thyself hast made ?

When in the cradle innocent I lay,

Thou, wicked spirit, stolest me away,

    And my abus'd soul didst bear

Into thy new-found worlds, I know not where,—

    Thy golden Indies in the air.

    And ever since I strive in vain

    My ravish'd freedom to regain ;

Still I rebel, still thou dost reign ;

Lo ! still in verse against thee I complain.

    There is a sort of stubborn weeds

Which, if the earth but once, it ever, breeds ;

    No wholesome herb can near them thrive,

    No useful plant can keep alive.

    The foolish sports I did on thee bestow

    Make all my art and labour fruitless now ;

*Where once such fairies dance, no grass doth ever grow."*

In estimating the poetry of this period, it is very common to condemn it for the conceits it abounds with. This is a censure in which it is necessary to exercise some caution. It is true that simplicity of thought is a precious element of poetry as distinguished from complications and involutions and entanglements of thought. The fault in many of these poets was, that, not content with a thought or feeling in its first simple form, they wandered far away from it in search of all fantastic allusions ; and when they bring you back to the original thought or feeling, its life is gone ;—it is dead and spiritless. These are what are called *cold conceits*. But it has been well said that a conceit is not necessarily cold. The mind, in certain states of passion, finds comfort in playing with occult or casual resemblances, and dallies

with the echo of a sound. What is not a conceit to those who read it in a temper different from that in which the writer composed it? The most pathetic parts of poetry to cold tempers seem and are nonsense, as divinity was to the Greeks foolishness. When Richard the Second, meditating on his own utter annihilation as to royalty, cries out,—

"Oh that I were a mockery-king of snow,  
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,  
To melt myself away in water-drops!"—

If we have been going on pace for pace with the passion before, this sudden conversion of a strong-felt metaphor into something to be actually realized in nature, like that of Jeremiah,—“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears!”—is strictly and strikingly natural. But come unprepared upon it, and it is a conceit; and so is a “head” turned into “waters.”

It is necessary to understand that real feeling may be compatible with a great deal of eccentricity of thought and quaintness of imagery in poetry, in order to appreciate those singular strains which, fancy-wrought as they are, were uttered from the very bottom of the heart of that sweet singer, George Herbert. It is poetry with many of the characteristics of the serious poetry of the seventeenth century, but with feeling, fancy, and thought blended together in proportions unlike the combination on any other pages. It is essentially devotional,—devotion, with Fancy serving it with the speed and wildness of a fairy's movements, taking any shape that poetic ingenuity could give, with the hope, that

“A verse may catch a wandering soul that flies  
Profounder tracts, and, by a blest surprise,  
Convert delight into a sacrifice.”

What, in its way, can be more pleasing than the sweet moralizing in what are perhaps his best-known lines,—on virtue?—

“Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky,  
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night;  
For thou must die.

“Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,  
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye,  
Thy root is ever in its grave;  
And thou must die.

“Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,—  
A box where sweets compacted lie,—  
My music show ye have your closes;  
And all must die.

“Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
 Like season'd timber, never gives,  
 But, though the whole world turn to coal,  
 Theu chiefly lives.”

His lines on “Life” have somewhat a more solemn strain, but so gentle a warning to mortality that even the young, light heart of beauty, happy with its innocent tribute of flowers, may not unwillingly receive a salutary pensiveness:—

“I made a posy while the day ran by:  
 Here will I smell my remnant out, and tie  
 My life within this band.  
 But time did beckon to the flowers, and they  
 By noon most cunningly did steal away,  
 And wither'd in my hand.  
 “My hand was next to them, and then my heart;  
 I took, without more thinking, in good part  
 Time's gentle admonition,  
 Who did so sweetly death's sad taste convey,  
 Making my mind to smell my fatal day,  
 Yet sugaring the suspicion.  
 “Farewell, dear flowers! sweetly your time ye spent!  
 Fit, while ye lived, for smell or ornament,  
 And, after death, for cures;  
 I follow straight, without complaints or grief,  
 Since, if my scent be good, I care not if  
 It be as short as yours!”

As a specimen of Herbert's more fantastic mood in dealing with his holy themes, I may cite the little poem entitled “Peace:”—

“Sweet Peace, where dost thou dwell? I humbly crave  
 Let me once know.  
 I sought thee in a secret cave,  
 And ask'd if Peace were there.  
 A hollow wind did seem to answer, ‘No;  
 Go seek elsewhere.’  
 “I did; and, going, did a rainbow note:  
 ‘Surely,’ thought I,  
 ‘This is the lace of Peace's coat:  
 I will search out the matter.’  
 But, while I look'd, the clouds immediately  
 Did break and scatter.  
 “Then went I to a garden, and did spy  
 A gallant flower,—  
 The crown imperial. ‘Sure,’ said I,

- ‘Peace at the root must dwell.’  
 But, when I digg’d, I saw a worm devour  
 What show’d so well.
- “At length I met a reverend, good old man,  
 Whom, when for Peace  
 I did demand, he thus began :—  
 ‘There was a prince of old  
 At Salem dwelt, who lived with good increase  
 Of flock and fold.
- “‘He sweetly lived; yet sweetness did not save  
 His life from foes.  
 But, after death, out of his grave  
 There sprang twelve stalks of wheat,  
 Which, many wondering at, got some of those  
 To plant and set.
- “‘It prosper’d strangely, and did soon disperse  
 Through all the earth;  
 For they that taste it do rehearse  
 That virtue lies therein,—  
 A secret virtue, bringing peace and mirth  
 By flight of sin.
- “‘Take of this grain which in my garden grows,  
 And grow for you.  
 Make bread of it; and that repose  
 And peace, which everywhere  
 With so much earnestness you do pursue,  
 Is only there.’”

That Herbert's poetry has many of the characteristics of the metaphysical poetry of Donne and Cowley cannot be denied, but redeemed by the fervent spirit of devotion breathing in every line. It is not the expression of a well-disciplined imagination, but is rather instinct with fancy. With all its peculiarities,—to use a kinder term than faults,—I had rather take it as it is, as one of the many tones of English poetry, than that its distinctive features should have been done away by stricter poetic discipline. It is curious to observe that Herbert has himself alluded to his participation in the over-wrought fashion of poetry, in a few lines which indicate its faults better, I think, than criticism has ever done, and close, too, with a statement of the best and universal theory of poetic art,—loyalty to nature in her own simplicity:—

- “When first my lines of heavenly joys made mention,  
 Such was their lustre,—they did so excel,—  
 That I sought out quaint words and trim invention.  
 My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,  
 Curling with metaphors a plain intention,  
 Decking the sense as if it were to sell.



"Thousands of notions in my brain did run,  
 Offering their service if I were not sped,  
 I often blotted what I had begun :  
 This was not quick enough, and that was dead,  
 Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sun,  
 Much less those joys which trample on his head.  
 "As flames do work and wind, when they ascend,  
 So did I weave myself into the sense ;  
 But, while I bustled, I might hear a friend  
 Whisper, 'How wide is all this long pretence ?  
 There is in love a sweetness ready penn'd ;  
 Copy out only that, and save expense.' "

Herbert is one of the many minor poets to whom we are indebted for the sacred poetry of the seventeenth century, which is so voluminous that it has been truly said a history of it might be regarded as an elaborate preface to the "Paradise Lost."

Passing from the serious to the light poetry of the seventeenth century, we meet with strains as light in their movement as fancy ever danced to. Even in the songs, however, of that period there is a vein of reflection showing thoughtfulness in the midst of sportiveness, as in the first stanzas of that light lyric of Herrick's :—

"Gather the rose-buds while ye may ;  
 Old Time is still a-flying ;  
 And this same flower that smiles to-day  
 To-morrow may be dying.  
 "The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,  
 The higher he's a-getting  
 The sooner will his race be run,  
 And nearer he's to setting."

It was to this poet, Robert Herrick, that English verse owes some of its most graceful and musical metrical arrangements. The music of the sweetest of Moore's melodies does not, it sounds to me, surpass the modulation of the verses entitled "The Night Piece :"—

"Her eyes the glowworm lend thee ;  
 The shooting stars attend thee ;  
 And the elves also,  
 Whose little eyes glow  
 Like the sparks of fires, befriend thee.  
 "No will-of-the-wisp mislight thee ;  
 Nor snake or slow-worm bite thee ;  
 But on thy way  
 Not making a stay,  
 Since ghost there is none to affright thee.

“ Let not the dark thee cumber ;  
 What though the moon doth slumber ?  
     The stars of the night  
     Will lend thee their light,  
 Like tapers clear without number.

“ Then, Julia, let me woo thee,  
 Thus, thus to come unto me ;  
     And, when I shall meet  
     Thy silvery feet,  
 My soul I ’ll pour into thee.”

It seems to have been Herrick’s pleasure to try the sound of a great variety of rhythms, to find what music the language was capable of. The musical close of the following lines is the result of one of these experiments :—

“ Am I despised because you say,  
 And I dare swear, that I am grey ?  
 Know, lady, you have but your day ;  
 And time shall come when you shall wear  
 Such frost and snow upon your hair.  
 And when (though long it comes to pass)  
 You question with your looking-glass,  
 And in that sincere crystal seek  
 But find no rose-bud in your cheek,  
 Nor any bed to give the show  
 Where such a rare carnation grew,—  
 Ah ! then, too late, close in your chamber keeping,  
     It will be told  
     That you are old,  
 By those true tears you ’re weeping ! ”

Of Herrick’s sacred poems the most admired is his “ Litany to the Holy Spirit,” of which the best stanzas are perhaps these :—

“ In the hour of my distresse,  
 When temptations me oppresse,  
 And when I my sins confesse,  
     Sweet Spirit, comfort me !  
 When I lie within my bed,  
 Sick in heart and sick in head,  
 And with doubts discomforted,  
     Sweet Spirit, comfort me !

\*            \*            \*            \*

When the house doth sigh and weep,  
 And the world is drown’d in sleep,  
 Yet mine eyes the watch do keep,  
     Sweet Spirit, comfort me !

When the passing bell doth toll,  
 And the furies, in a shoal,  
 Come to fright a parting soul,  
     Sweet Spirit, comfort me !

When the tapers now burn blue  
 And the comforters are few,  
 And that number more than true,  
     Sweet Spirit, comfort me !

\*            \*            \*            \*

When the judgment is reveal'd,  
 And that open'd which was seal'd ;  
 When to Thee I have appeal'd,  
     Sweet Spirit, comfort me ! "

In tracing the progress of English poetry and endeavouring to pre-serve some general reference to the course of English national history, though of necessity in a very loose way, I cannot pass by an era so memorable as the great civil war in the seventeenth century. The character of that period, its men and its events, is a theme of momentous interest if treated with reference to political and ecclesiastical considerations. Its literary interest is but small. The times were too troublous: the elements of society in wild commotion,—the feverish anxiety of domestic war, with its protracted miseries,—all were adverse to activity in the cause of letters. There was not repose enough for the meditation which is needful for all good writing. Now, I have no wish to mingle views of politics with views of poetry, when they have little, if anything, to do with each other. But there is a prevalent error touching the literature of those times, which ought to be noticed. I mean the habit of speaking of the Republican party in the civil war as the less poetical party. This is one of those prescriptive forms of speech which are handed from one author to another,—so habitually repeated that its truth is not questioned; and I have observed that it has blinded the most acute and accurate of the historians. When you come to reflect upon it, why, there is one single Republican name that will outweigh the Royalist poets of the whole century. You may place in one scale the poetry of Milton, and in the other that of Cowley, the best poet of the other side, with all the effusions of every poet of kindred politics,—you may pile thereon all the antipathies and prejudices of Dr. Johnson,—and the beam of the balance will still scarcely be moved to recover its equipoise. But, while I notice such an opinion for the purpose of denying its truth, I feel, at the same time, that there is something low and unworthy in bringing poetry within the range of political partisanship. What has it to do with such things? And has

it not, on the other hand, to do with a lofty enthusiasm in all its forms? If ever there was a strife in which high and pure principles and noble emotions were arrayed on *both* sides, it was that civil war. The general character of the struggle was, I believe, truly given in the words of one of the greatest British statesmen and orators, when Lord Chatham said of it, "There was ambition; there was sedition; there was violence: but no man shall persuade me it was not the cause of liberty on one side and of tyranny on the other." On each side there were vices: on the one, fanaticism and hypocrisy, on the other, profligacy and voluptuousness; and, on both sides, violence and tyranny. But what gives that contest its glorious interest is that the ranks of each great party of the nation contained noble spirits, in whom were embodied, on the one side, the high-minded enthusiasm of a generous loyalty, and, on the other, the equally fervid enthusiasm of the love of freedom,—happy in its hopes and its short-lived enjoyment of republicanism.

"No sea

Swells like the bosom of a man set free!"

In contemplating that period, it should be with the large-hearted candour which can recognise and admire the strength and purity of these opposing principles, reverencing both the spotless integrity of a faithful cavalier like Derby, sealing his loyalty with his blood; and, on the other hand, the magnanimity of those who aspired to political freedom in the spirit of moral freedom,

"The later Sydney, Marvell, Harrington,  
Young Vane, and others, who call'd Milton friend."

Now, when I come to the study of the poetry of that generation, I seek to know whether it may not be found in connection with those strong and generous passions which belonged to the best representatives of the times. I need not stop to observe that the Puritan system and discipline were adverse—avowedly so—to poetic culture. It was vanity to their strict intellect,—a toy for the malignants. Nor need I more than state that, in the ephemeral poetry (if the political songs and satires deserved the title of poetry), the polished Cavaliers knew how to play the game better than their stern opponents, the Roundheads. I would find some poetry more enduring than those occasional things, and in sympathy with the better heart which animated the worthy portion of each party. The search, pursued in this spirit, is not in vain; for it enables me to cite, in a few noble lines of Marvell, an admirable tribute to the serenity with which the king met his fate when his undaunted enemies struck the crown from his brow, and then deliberately doomed

the discrowned head of Charles Stuart to the block,—a bloody atonement, which should bring a charity for his errors and an admiration for the meek resignation of his last moments, such as inspires these lines, the composition of a staunch friend of the people,—the friend, too, of Milton,—telling how the royal actor was brought

“The tragie scaffold to adorn,  
While round the arméd bands  
Did clap their bloody hands.  
He nothing common did, or mean,  
Upon that memorable scene,  
But with his keener eye  
The axe’s edge did try ;  
Nor call’d the gods, with vulgar spite,  
To vindicate his helpless right,  
But bow’d his comely head  
Downe as upon a bed ! ”

There are two scarcely-known poets of this period, who, being equally zealous on opposite political sides, and encountering similar misfortunes in consequence of party reverses, present excellent types of the influence on poetic character of their various modes of thought and feeling. Richard Lovelace was a fine specimen of a gallant cavalier,—a soldier with a scholar’s accomplishments. He risked his life and spent his whole patrimony in the hapless cause of his king. Among his poems are two songs, perhaps as happy efforts of the kind as any in the language. I can well credit the tradition of his virtue, his modesty, his chivalrous courtesy and courage, when I reflect on the sentiment at the close of the lines I am about to repeat ; for there is in it a world of the morality of love’s philosophy,—two or three words of wisdom which every lover should make his maxim. It was composed when he was going to the wars, and reconciles, with equal truth and grace of feeling, the soldier’s and the lover’s duty :—

“Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,  
That, from the nunnery  
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind,  
To war and arms I fly.

“True, a new mistress now I chase,—  
The first foe in the field ;  
And with a stronger faith embrace  
A sword, a horse, a shield.

“Yet this inconstancy is such  
As you too shall adore :  
*I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honour more.*”



This soldier's services in the cause of the monarchy cost him not only his fortune, but his liberty. He was cast by the parliamentary party into prison; but his unbroken spirit found utterance in his most famous song:—"To Althea, from prison,"—a strain perfectly characteristic of the cavalier-feeling,—a high-toned loyalty and gallantry and gayety:—

"When Love, with unconfined wings,  
Hovers within my gates,  
And my divine Althea brings  
To whisper at the grates,—  
When I lie tangled in her hair  
And fetter'd to her eye,—  
The birds that wanton in the air  
Know no such liberty.

"When flowing cups run swiftly round,  
With no allaying Thames,—  
Our careless heads with roses bound,  
Our hearts with loyal flames,—  
When thirsty grief in wine we steep,—  
When health and draughts go free,—  
Fishes that tinkle in the deep  
Know no such liberty.

"When, like committed linnets, I,  
With shriller throat, shall sing  
The sweetness, mercy, majesty,  
And glories of my king,—  
When I shall voice aloud how good  
He is,—how great should be,—  
Enlargéd winds, that curl the flood,  
Know no such liberty.

"Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for a hermitage.  
If I have freedom in my love,  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone, that soar above,  
Enjoy such liberty."

By the side of the memory of Lovelace let me briefly place that of a poet with as stout a heart, but pledged to the opposite side in the civil wars,—“honest George Wither,” the author of so many pieces that literary antiquaries have scarce been able to gather them from their obscurity. The homeliness of his versification places his poetry often below the smooth flow of Lovelace's lyrics; but the gallantry of the cavalier could not produce strains of more fervid chivalry in praise of female loveli-

ness. The sentiment was never more feelingly and fancifully expressed than when, for instance, in part of a long-sustained strain, he exclaims,—

“Stars, indeed, fair creatures be;  
Yet, amongst us, where is he  
Joys not more the while he lies  
Sunning in his mistress’ eyes,  
Than in all the glimmering light  
Of a starry winter night?”

His long life was spent in a perpetual mood of poetical exaltation. He was for ever writing his verses, always after a fashion of his own and under most unpropitious circumstances. His days were full alternately of action and suffering: one while commanding a troop of horse in the service of the Parliament; again, twice deliberately abiding in London to witness the terrors of the plague, or braving the penalties of the law; fined and imprisoned over and over again in the Tower, the Marshalsea, and Newgate; and yet keeping his heart whole to the last. It has been well said of him that he was for ever anticipating persecution and martyrdom, fingering the flames, as it were, to try how he could bear them. He was a man of strong and serviceable piety. In all the ecclesiastical feverishness of the times, he ever called himself a Catholic Christian, declaring his religion is not mumbling over thrice a day

“A set of *Ave-Marias*, or of creeds,  
Or many hours formally to pray,  
When from a dull devotion it proceeds;  
Nor is it up and down the land to seek  
To find those well-breathed lecturers that can  
Preach thrice a Sabbath and six times a week,  
Yet be as fresh as when they first began.”

At the age of seventy-three he was cast into prison. I have shown how the encaged spirit of a cavalier could sing. It will now be seen that Wither’s Muse could utter, if not as melodious, a more thoughtful, strain:—

“And is this Newgate, whereof so afraid  
Offenders are? Is this the dismal place  
Wherein, before I came, I heard it said  
There’s nothing but grief, horror, and disgrace?  
I find it otherwise: and doubtless either  
It is belyed, or they who are sent hither  
Within themselves, when to this house they come,  
Bring that which makes it seem so troublesome.

“I no worse here than where I was before  
Accommodated am; for, though confined  
From some things, which concern my body more  
Than formerly, it hath enlarged my mind.”

The same indomitable spirit—a magnanimous self-sufficiency—is expressed in the lines,—

“My mind’s my kingdom; and I will permit  
No other’s will to have the rule of it;  
For I am free, and no man’s power I know  
Did make me thus, nor shall unmake me now;  
But, through a spirit none can quench in me,  
This mind I got, and this my mind shall be.”

When beggared by his calamities, he consoles himself on the loss of property with a reflection which he expresses with a fine poetic simile:—

“I with my losses [am] so well content  
As is a Christian, when, by Turks pursued,  
Who overpower him by their multitude,  
He wrecks his vessel on a friendly shore,  
Where he hath life and freedom, though no more.”

The voyage of George Wither’s life was indeed on a stormy sea. According to the sailor’s superstition, the winds were for ever coming at his whistling. But in the worst of the storm it was always in his power to bring his tempest-tost bark to ride at anchor,—the anchorage of Christian hopefulness. His poetic studies, too, were an unceasing delight to him;—not a sentimental luxury, weakening his energy or his fortitude, but giving renewed strength to his stout heart. Earnestly has he told how his spirit was ever thus invigorated, in lines containing a simple but as strong a statement of a student’s intellectual and moral resources—the sunshine of an imaginative heart—as ever was penned:—

“They cause me to be fearless of my foes;  
When I am vex’d, my spirits they compose;  
When I am poor, they are in stead of wealth;  
When I am sick, they help repair my health;  
When I am well, they are my recreation,  
When tempted to despair, hope’s reparation:  
Thereby, when sadness comes, to mirth I turn it;  
When I am slighted, they do make me scorn it.  
In prisons when my body is confined,  
They do so many ways enlarge my mind,  
That, doubting whether will for me prove best,—  
The freedom lost or that which is possest,—  
I use the means of both; but wholly leave  
The choice to God; and what he gives, receive.  
They are companions when I’m left alone;  
They find me work to do when I have none;  
By day me from ill company they keep,  
Make nights less tedious when I cannot sleep.

They ease me when I am opprest with wrongs;  
When I want music, they do make me songs."

This literary gratefulness rises on a higher strain in his address to his Muse :—

"She's my mind's companion still,  
Spite of Envy's evil will;  
She doth tell me where to borrow  
Comfort in the midst of sorrow;  
Makes the desolatest place  
To her presence be a grace,  
And the blackest discontents  
To be pleasing ornaments.  
In my former days of bliss,  
Her divine skill taught me this :—  
That from everything I saw  
I could some invention draw,  
And raise pleasure to her height,  
Through the meanest object's sight;  
By the murmur of a spring,  
Or the least bough rustleing,—  
By a daisy whose leaves spread  
Shut when Titan goes to bed,—  
Or a shady bush or tree,—  
She could more infuse in me  
Than all nature's beauties can  
In some other wiser man."

It is passages like these, recognising the resources of a chastened imagination and the influence of true poetry upon individual happiness, that have won for George Wither, neglected as his memory has been, a fine tribute, which, in closing this lecture, I desire to leave in your thoughts :—"The praises of poetry have been often sung in ancient and modern times; strange powers have been ascribed to it of influence over animate and inanimate auditors; its force over fascinated crowds has been acknowledged; but before Wither no one ever celebrated its power at home, the wealth and the strength which this divine gift confers upon its possessor. Fame—and that, too, after death—was all which hitherto the poets had promised themselves from their art. It seems to have been left to (George) Wither to discover that poetry was a present possession as well as a rich reversion, and that the Muse had promise of both lives,—of this and of that which is to come."

## LECTURE VIII.

### The Age of the Restoration: Dryden.

AMBIGUITIES IN THE GENERAL TITLES ADOPTED TO DESIGNATE PARTICULAR LITERARY ERAS—THE LAST QUARTER OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY THE AGE OF DRYDEN—THE DEGRADED TASTES OF HIS TIMES—THE ALLIANCE OF HIGH POETRY WITH VIRTUE—THE TRUE STANDARD OF POETIC MERIT—DRYDEN'S POETRY A REFLECTION OF THE TIMES OF CHARLES II.—PROFLIGACY OF THAT AGE—CHARACTER OF CHARLES STUART—THE SPIRIT OF POETRY IS A SPIRIT OF ENTHUSIASM—THE DEBASING EFFECTS OF THE CIVIL WARS—SHAFTESBURY AS LORD-CHANCELLOR—RECEPTION OF THE PARADISE LOST—WINSTANLEY'S LIVES OF THE ENGLISH POETS—MILTON'S EXPOSITION OF KINGLY DUTY—THE DRAMA DURING THE AGE OF THE RESTORATION—DRYDEN'S PLAYS—DEFECTS OF RHYMING TRAGEDIES—"THE FALL OF INNOCENCE"—DRYDEN'S ALTERATION OF "THE TEMPEST"—"ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL"—BUCKINGHAM—LITERARY LARCENY—SIR EGERTON BRYDGES'S LINES ON MILTON—"THE HIND AND THE PANTHER"—"ALEXANDER'S FEAST"—"ODE FOR ST. CECILIA'S DAY"—DRYDEN'S LATER POETRY.

IN studying the literature of a nation it is necessary to bear in mind that general titles adopted to designate particular eras will almost inevitably be liable to ambiguities, which are calculated to suggest, imperceptibly, erroneous impressions. The employment of the title of the sovereign, as is usual, in marking the periods of English literature, is manifestly attended with this confusion:—that the reign may not be found to correspond, as to time, with the age in which the writers flourished. For instance, the literary age of Queen Elizabeth is not the political reign of Queen Elizabeth; for half of the reign was spent before the glory of its poetry was developed. Again: if we employ the name of the most illustrious author to indicate a period of literary history, the mind unconsciously adopts an opinion which may be greatly erroneous:—that his fame had gained in his own times the influence and authority it has received only from posterity. In this respect there would be an absurdity were we to speak of "the age of Milton," or even of Shakspeare; for many years rolled over the graves of each of those poets before the might of their genius was realized. Especially may this be said with regard to Milton, between whom and the spirit of the times in which his great poem was published there was so great an uncongeniality that, to refer the favourite poets of those days, with all their poetical heresies, their low morality, and their sins against the



laws of pure and disciplined imagination, to the age of Milton, would be an incongruity as flagrant as the Roman usage of dating the age of their casks of wine by a reference to the date of the magistracy of a consul,—a cask of Falernian stamped with a name, perhaps, as stern as Caius Marius.

The period I am about entering upon in this lecture forms a striking exception to these remarks; for, if we seek a title to designate the last quarter of the seventeenth century, there need not be a moment's hesitation in appropriating to it the name of Dryden. From the year 1674, when the death of Milton took place, down to the year 1700,—the date of Dryden's death,—Dryden held in English poetry an absolute and exclusive supremacy. He and the age were suited to each other. He was the fit representative of the times of Charles II. With talents which might, by moral chastening and intellectual discipline, have secured to him a pure fame, he prostituted the poet's sacred endowment to unholy and base purposes. Now, this is lamentable. It would be so in the annals of the poetry of any people; but in those of English poetry it is doubly, deeply deplorable. Think for a moment of the mighty minds I have been contemplating in the previous lectures,—mighty, I mean, in their purity as well as in their power,—indeed, their purity was part of their power; think of Spenser's spotless spirit, knowing no debasement in years either of prosperity or adversity; of Shakspeare's gentle and gigantic genius, uncontaminated even by the courses into which his life was cast; and of Milton, with all his partisanship in a fierce warfare, still keeping his imagination insphered in regions of serene air,—

“Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot  
Which men call earth.”

What mortal monarch seated on earthly throne, though, like Satan's throne in Pandemonium, it

“Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,  
Or where the gorgeous East, with richest hand,  
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,”—

What king, I say, could, either by kingly power or by kingly frown, have extorted from John Milton a single line profaning the sacred trust of his precious talent, held “ever in his great Taskmaster's eye”? Remember how, as we have been considering one great name after another on the register of England's mighty poets, we have thus far found the genius of all of them enlisted in the cause of virtue, militant on the side of truth, nobly fulfilling their destiny, and leaving behind them

undying words which wing their flight over each generation as it rises and passes away ; so that we, I hope, may have caught some enthusiasm from their sound, centuries after those words were first uttered :—

“ Blessings be with them, and eternal praise,  
 Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares,—  
 The poets who, on earth, have made us heirs  
 Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays.”

This benediction is not due to all, however rightfully they may claim the title of poet. There is one principle I shall cling to at every part of these lectures, because I am deeply convinced of its truth, and because, too, the annals of English poetry will sustain me in it :—that one inseparable attribute of all the highest poetry is alliance with virtue ; that its tendency, mute though it be to the sensual and the dark, is to make the wise and the good still wiser, still better, still happier. Has it not been so, even after making full allowance for all violations of propriety in less refined states of society, with every one of the great poets we have been considering ? Let their pure, imaginative morality be remembered, both because I do not wish to lead you unadvised into a different poetic atmosphere, and because, before this course is closed, I must apply this principle to other eminent names besides that of Dryden.

I am anxious to render justice to Dryden's powers, and shall strive to do so. Neither do I wish to limit literary research or taste to the productions of the *great masters* ; for English poetry abounds with poems of unnumbered degrees of merit : its secondary poetry is rich ; so is its minor poetry ; and even from the poetry of writers whose names are unknown to fame, as fragrant an anthology could be culled as in the literature of any language. But when I hear people talk of the poets carelessly or ignorantly, or, it may be, intentionally, coupling in an indiscriminate series Spenser, Milton, Dryden, and Pope, every principle of judgment and feeling and taste revolts. When taking Milton's standard, and acknowledging for the *greatest* poetry only that which is full of religious, of glorious and magnificent uses, and then looking at the uses to which Dryden debased his imagination, the question as to his poetic rank becomes simply a question how can this corruption put on the incorruption of a great poet's glory. In the course of these lectures I have had occasion to remark the influence exercised on the genius of the poets by the spirit of the times they lived in, but never finding that influence acquiring an ascendancy over their innate powers. Passing events seemed to float over their lives, as on a sunny day the shadow of a floating cloud is seen to speed over the surface of

the fields, giving, indeed, different hues and tints, but not changing native and unalterable colours. Whatever adaptation the great poets made to their respective times, they ever kept that independence which gives to genius its home amid many generations. With Dryden a different relation began; for he sought a habitation steaming with a thousand vices, and there he dwelt till his garland and singing-robcs were polluted by the contagion. Throughout Dryden's poems may be traced, in a distinct reflection, the character of the times of Charles II.; and each should, therefore, be examined by the literary or historical student, for they are reciprocally illustrative. The temper of that time is stamped upon its literature. The poets, instead of their high office of "allaying the perturbations of the mind and setting the affections in right tune," had no worthier charge than to pamper the low passions of a worthless and adulterate generation. There probably never was a period of literature when it was more affected by extrinsic agencies than that now under review,—the age of the second Charles. Let us look, therefore, for a moment or two, at its characteristics.

Memory may run over the whole period of more than two thousand years,—the life of our British ancestry,—and not find any portion of it so loathsome as those twenty years during which Charles Stuart the younger was restored to the throne of his fathers.

Happier would it have been for any one having a man's heart within his breast to live in the barbaric age of British *paganism*, with all its ferocity, and the terrors of a hideous superstition,—when, in Cowper's fine lines,—

"The Druids struck the well-strung harps they bore,  
With fingers deeply dyed in *human* gore;  
And, while the victim slowly bled to death,  
Upon the tolling chords rung out his dying breath;"—

Better to have lived amid the wild consternation of the fiercest of England's invasions or the bloodiest of its civil wars,—better in the dismay of Mary's martyrdoms, or beneath the iron rod of Cromwell's military usurpation,—than to have pined heart-sick at the sight of all the debasing profligacy which burst upon England at the time of the Restoration. When Cowley, with the fervour of royalty upon him, gave vent to his indignation at the Protector's dynasty, it was in a strain which would have better fitted the lips of a generous Briton chafing under the abominations of his country,—its hereditary monarch restored:—

"Come the eleventh plague rather this should be;  
Come sink us rather in the sea:  
Come rather pestilence and reap us down;  
Come God's sword, rather than our own.

Let rather Roman come again,  
Or Saxon, Norman, or the Dane.

In all the bonds we ever bore,  
We grieved, we sigh'd, we wept; *we never blush'd before.*"

Upon Charles Stuart the lesson of adversity was wasted. After a childhood and youth pampered with the perilous luxury that attends the footsteps of an heir to royalty, the full cup of his confident hopes was dashed from his lips, when calamities undreamed of were poured down upon the royal household. The only occasion when he showed a manly spirit—when, backed by Scottish courage, he staked his fortunes on the field of battle to gain the throne of his fathers—had been preceded by an act of perjured hypocrisy; for, kneeling on the spot where his royal Scottish ancestors had sworn their coronation-oath, he called God to witness his plighted faith to a covenant he both detested and despised. The mailed hand of Cromwell was still the hand of victory; and the defeat at Worcester left the young king an outcast and a fugitive, sheltered only by the indomitable loyalty of his adherents, whose devotion he had no heart to be grateful for, for he prized it at no dearer rate than the trunk of the oak which once hid him from his pursuers. He fled to France, abandoning himself to effeminate, vulgar, and vicious pleasures. Unhappily, the British blood that flowed in his veins was mingled with the blood of one of those licentious monarchs who had soiled the purity of the French monarchy: it will be remembered he was the grandson of Henry IV.

Let it not be thought that I am wandering from my subject. I seek to show that if the spirit of a nation goes down, its poetry, if suffered to sympathize with the causes of its degradation, will go down with it. In the spirit of those times, and of Charles II. as representing it, I can find ample explanation of the sinking of English poetry. Every pure and noble sentiment, every generous emotion, every lofty thought, became a jest. Now, these are the life of poetry, which in its best forms can breathe only in an atmosphere of purity; and whenever such cannot be found, it is the chief duty of poetry to create it,—to ventilate, as it were, a stagnant and corrupted air. The spirit of poetry—and, let me add, too, the love of it—is a spirit of enthusiasm. Amid the wide-spread corruption, the writings of a few poets and not a few of the clergy show that all hearts were not defiled; and that brazen age was well described by one of its divines, when he said, "To fight against religion by scoffing is the game the devil seems to be playing in the present age. He hath tried the power and rage of the mighty and the wit and knowledge of the learned, but these have not succeeded for the destruction of religion;



and therefore now he is making an experiment by another sort of enemies, and sets the apes and drollers upon it. And certainly there was never any other age in which sacred things have been so rudely and impudently assaulted by the profane abuses of jesters and buffoons, who have been the contempt of all wise times, but are the darlings and wits of these." The severe discipline of Puritan-morality once removed, there came quickly in its stead a lawlessness whose pride was its freedom from all restraint. Immorality was a thing men boasted of; they took a party-pride in vice. The civil wars had also demoralized the people, by breaking up the habits and regularity of domestic life. Households were destroyed, and their proprietors found a residence in taverns; and, when the causes of such disordered life had passed away, the low habits it had engendered were left behind. Often, beggared by the wars, the sufferers were driven, in the words of as gallant a cavalier as Lovelace, "to steep their thirsty grief in wine." During the Middle Ages, the miseries that followed in the train of war had been famine and pestilence; but after the civil wars in England came debauchery, licentiousness, riot, and blasphemy. To such a condition of public feeling the only poetry that could be welcome was that prostituted form of it which delights in loose lays or bacchanalian orgies. The intellectual tastes of Charles II. have been historically recorded, and are typical of his times. Mentally, he was by no means deficient, but, on the contrary, possessed of much quickness of mind. Quotations from Hudibras, with all the indecencies of its wit, were often on his lips; the bombastic tragedies and the obscene comedies of the Restoration were congenial to him, and doubtless, too, the songs of Sedley and Rochester. There was another taste of the monarch, illustrative also of the downward course of the spirit of the age,—a sort of zeal for material science, prosecuted to the exclusion of all spirituality. The king had his private laboratory, where he carried on experiments as far removed from a true love of science as the filthy chemistry in the cauldrons of the witches in "Macbeth." Charles II. was a materialist in the grossest sense of the word:—

"One all eyes  
Philosopher! a fingering slave;  
One that would peep and botanize  
Upon his mother's grave!

It has been his good luck, however, to gain the epithet of the "*merry* monarch;" and thus has many a one been led to think that good-nature and a sportive temper, an amiable playfulness, were his attributes. The sport he made was with things he ought to have held in reverence; and he played with honour and justice, with womanly virtue and all



noble emotions. We often forget, in laughing at the frolics of the king or his courtiers, how dangerous were their jests. When one of the most profligate of his adherents was raised most unworthily to a high station, judicial dignity was made sport with, and the people taught to ridicule what they should have stood in awe of. A contemporary historian thus tells of one of these adventures. When Lord-Chancellor Shaftesbury ordered his procession to Westminster Hall on the first day of term, "his lordship had an early fancy or freak, the day (when all the officers of the law, king's counsel, and judges used to wait upon the great seal to Westminster Hall), to make this procession on horse-back, as in old time the way was, when coaches were not so rife; and accordingly the judges, &c. were spoken to, to get horses, as they and all the rest did, by borrowing and hiring, and so equipped themselves with black foot-cloths in the best manner they could: and divers of the nobility, as usual, in compliance and honour to a new Lord-Chancellor, attended also in their equipments. Upon notice in town of this cavalcade, all the show-company took their places at windows and balconies, with the foot-guard in the streets, to partake of the fine sight; and, being once well settled for the march, it moved, as the design was, *statelily* along. But when they came to straits and interruptions, for want of gravity in the beasts, and too much in the riders, there happened some curvetting which made no little disorder. Judge Twisden, to his great affright and the consternation of his grave brethren, was laid along in the dirt; but all at length arrived safe, without loss of life or limb in the service. This accident was enough to divert the like frolic for the future; and the very next term they fell to their coaches as before."

This certainly must have been a comical spectacle. The grave dignitaries of the bench, deprived of their long-enjoyed security of rolling along in their huge, lumbering coaches of state, and unexpectedly ordered on this cavalry-service; the steeds, fretted by the timid and awkward horsemanship of men whose skill lay in other subjects, and judicial authority, of but little avail in their procession, and soon converted into judicial consternation when poor Judge Twisden was unhorsed at full length in the mire of a London street. But, setting aside the ludicrousness of the mishap of this judicial cavalcade, it was a frolic which could hardly have been ventured on except by a chancellor of such a monarch. It was a piece of reckless frivolity worthy alike of Shaftesbury and of Charles,—men to whose unbridled humours profligacy was a jest. "Shaftesbury," said the king, on one occasion, "thou art the wickedest dog in England." "May it please your Ma-

jesty," replied the statesman, dutifully yielding the post of honour, "of a *subject*, I believe I am."

Let me ask, What hope could there be for poetry to escape the gibe and the jest in an age when authority in high places could thus make the ermine "a motley to the view"? The temper more adverse than any other to poetry is the predominance of unchastened ridicule; for the simple reason that it is a temper at variance with all that is sublime or graceful in humanity. If the poet cannot wing his flight above the reach of parodies and satirical jests and all the light archery of ridicule, his region must be a low and impure one, in which the fire of the best poetry cannot be sustained.

A literary question, affecting the character of the times I am now speaking of, has been discussed by several writers, by whom different opinions are entertained respecting the reception of Milton's "Paradise Lost." The fact of thirteen hundred copies having been sold in two years (entitling the author, I may mention in passing, to a second payment of five pounds), and of three thousand copies being sold in eleven years, has been much relied on to prove that the slowness of Milton's advance to the glory of his earthly fame has been exaggerated. This is no proof of his contemporaries having done justice to the poem, nor does it sanction the conclusion of the poet's having attained anything like what may be called popularity, which was then under a dominion, in the jurisdiction of taste, which could not by any possibility have recognised the high and chaste splendour of Milton's imagination. It has been well asked and answered, Who were the readers and the buyers of the "Paradise Lost"? They were the small number of Milton's friends and the liberal lovers of true poetry, who are *many*, though *not the many*:—young men eager to admire, who found a new power created within them by the influence of that mighty orb of song; and old men that felt their youth restored in all its energy, but with none of its turbulence, by that divine harmony. But these were readers whose influence on public opinion must have been inappreciably small in their generation. The dissolute monarch and some equally dissolute nobles were for a time the literary dictators. As to influence from other quarters, it has been well though strongly said that the classical Republicans were few and inefficient; the Puritans would not read poetry; the High-Church bigots would read nothing but what emanated from their own party; the commonplace, roystering Royalists were seldom sober enough to read, and the mob-fanatics did not know their letters.

But I desire no better proof to show how unheeded were Milton's

inspirations by the common mind of those times than a fine passage closing one of the books of "Paradise Regained." A literary censorship was part of the machinery of the monarchy; and, when in some tragedy or other there was a plot which chanced to be typical of Charles II.'s profligacy, the hand of the censor was placed upon it, not because there was danger that the representation might, like Hamlet's play, catch the *conscience* of the king, or, in Shakspeare's phrase, "make mad the guilty and appal the free," but because the people, in their familiar intercourse with the drama, might have quickly and offensively applied the play to their own sovereign. Now, the passage I am about to cite from Milton could have passed uncensured only because overlooked as innocent from the anticipated neglect of the poem in an unworthy age. It is a noble exposition of kingly duty,—the office of a king set forth with a sublime morality by a republican,—a placid admonition, full at the same time of the deepest implied rebuke to one like him under whose sway it was written:—

"A crown,  
Golden in show, is but a wreath of thorns;  
Brings dangers, troubles, cares, and sleepless nights  
To him who wears the regal diadem,  
When on his shoulders each man's burden lies.  
For therein stands the office of a king,  
His honour, virtue, merit, and chief praise,  
That for the public all this weight he bears.  
Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules  
Passions, desires, and fears, is more a king;  
Which every wise and virtuous man attains;  
And who attains not, ill aspires to rule  
Cities of men, or headstrong multitudes,  
Subject himself to anarchy within,  
Or lawless passions in him, which he serves.  
But to guide nations in the way of truth  
By saving doctrine, and from error lead  
To know, and, knowing, worship God aright,  
Is yet more kingly. This attracts the soul,  
Governs the inner man, the nobler part;  
That other o'er the body only reigns,  
And oft by force; which, to a geucrous mind,  
So reigning, can be no sincere delight."

Dryden's career of authorship began some years before the publication of Milton's great poems. One of his early pieces was his heroic stanzas on the death of Cromwell; and, when the Restoration took place, he veered quickly round, and was ready with a congratulatory poem on the happy return of His Sacred Majesty Charles II., and a

panegyric for the coronation-day. When, after the austere years of the commonwealth, poetical composition began to be again cultivated, it resumed the form of the metaphysical poetry of the preceding years, resembling—to borrow Sir Walter Scott's clever simile—those who, after a long mourning, resume for a time their ordinary dresses, of which the fashion has in the mean time passed away. But it was only a short-continued revival. A new fashion of taste was coming instead of the harsh and scholastic form which had been so laboriously cultivated.

One immediate consequence of the Restoration was the opening of the theatres and the attendant renewal of dramatic literature. It was not, however, the renewal of the old drama,—the drama of Shakspeare and his strong contemporaries. That was too massy for a frivolous generation. Besides, Charles II. came back to his native land with tastes as corrupt as his morals. The French drama had grown familiar and pleasing to his ear; and, however it may have suited the reign of France, it never was meant to be domesticated in England.

The literature of every language has its distinctive and proper characteristics; and, whenever any attempt is made to disguise them in a foreign dress, injury is inevitably done by the metamorphosis. In this way the English drama was spoiled by the Gallican character that was given to it; and in a similar way, let me here add, would good prose writing be, were it possible for the intolerable attempt of a few living writers—one especially of considerable power (Carlyle)—to Germanize English style, to receive a general sanction. The imported influence on the drama of England gave it a forced, unnatural, hyperbolical inflation, greatly contrasted with its true native power. The stately march and the pompous diction which it was deemed proper for the French stage to assume in the august presence of Louis XIV. was to be acted over in the presence of his kinsman Charles II. The tragedies which this taste gave rise to were what were called the *heroic* plays. All the men were made to speak in the stately style of fanciful *heroes*, and all the women were to be veritable tragedy-queens. These dramas are also entitled, with reference to another trait, “the *rhyming* tragedies.” The blank verse, so admirably proved, in the earlier and incomparably better dramas, as suited to the expression of passion, was laid aside, and Dryden boldly vindicated the use of rhyme, the unceasing recurrence of identical sounds in the most monotonous form of rhyme,—the couplet,—as a step in advance of his great dramatic predecessors, and as carrying the drama another degree on towards perfection. Immediately after the Restoration, Dryden devoted his powers to the popular and patronized labour of manufacturing acting plays for the stage: he became a



prolific playwright, producing more tragedies than I have been at the pains of counting. He wrote them by contract, the bargain stipulating the number, the time, and the compensation; and the result was, in most cases, very like what is, I believe, the usual character of contract labour. But these plays of Dryden's answered the author's purpose: they were written to sell, and not to survive their temporary service. They were received in the green-room, acted, applauded, printed, and are forgotten. They may be revived, so far as a reprint in Dryden's Complete Works, as edited by Sir Walter Scott, is a revival; but, for all that, they are dead beyond all chance—I will not say *hope*—of restoration. Their only resuscitation is an occasional exhumation by some labourer in obsolete literature, bringing them to light again, like poor “Yorrick's skull,” the *king's jester*, full of dirt and jowled to the ground and knocked about the mazzard by a sexton's spade; and then these dead things of a once busy poet may be moralized over by some literary student in Hamlet's very words:—“Alas! poor Yorick!—a fellow of infinite jest and most excellent fancy: where be your jibes now? your gambols? your songs? the dust is earth.”

It is not my intention to illustrate by quotation the bad taste and the wretched poetry of the heroic plays in which Dryden had so guilty a share; for, while I am relying greatly upon your indulgence in a course of lectures so comprehensive in its range as that I have ventured on, it would not be prudent to put your patience in jeopardy by imposing on you tasteless and uninteresting citations. Let me say that the whole theory of these productions was unsound; and I will endeavour to show it in a way which will at the same time give me the opportunity of introducing something in the way of incidental comment on Shakspeare. It will be remembered by every one, that in the tragedy of Hamlet there is introduced a little drama which is acted in the presence of the imaginary king and courtiers,—a play, therefore, within a play. It must have been observed too, by even careless readers of our great dramatists, without perhaps being aware of the reason for it, that the style of the play before the king is wholly different from the style of Shakspeare's own play. The secondary play, as I may call it, is in rhyme; the sentiments are in an exaggerated vein, and the language hyperbolical: how different from the primary play, Shakspeare's own exquisite blank verse and his just tone of thought and feeling, as may readily be shown by placing a few lines of each in contrast! I select expressions of thought not altogether unlike:—

“Orderly to end, where I begun:

Our wills and fates do so contrary run



That our devices still are overthrown ;  
 Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own :  
 So think thou wilt no second husband wed ;  
 But die thy thoughts, when thy first lord is dead."

Now by the side of this observe a meditation of Shakspeare clothed in his appropriate diction :—

" Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,  
 When our deep plots do pall ; and that should teach us,  
 There 's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
 Rough-hew them how we will."

In this difference of style, both of thought and language, Shakspeare acted from a deep principle of art. If the play within the play had been expressed in his usual style, there would have been nothing to distinguish it. It was necessary to have a line of discrimination between the two; otherwise Hamlet and the dramatic interlude woven into the plot would have been very much the same thing. But how was this to be accomplished? In a way manifesting Shakspeare's perfect sense of the true philosophy of the drama as an imaginative imitation of life. The play to be acted at Hamlet's suggestion, to satisfy his doubts of the king's guilt, was, of course, one degree further removed from nature; and consequently a style proportionately removed from the ordinary speech of life was appropriated to it: a hyperbolical strain was needed to show its position beyond the primary drama, it being an imitation within an imitation, and the most fastidious taste is thus unconsciously reconciled to its exaggerations. Now, in applying these principles to the heroic tragedies of Dryden, it is perceived that the author has gone directly to the exaggerations, without any of that necessity which is the explanation of Shakspeare's employment of such a style. The simple language of imagination was not stimulant enough for a vitiated taste. The bounds of nature, within which the genius of Shakspeare moved, were disdainfully overleaped; and the consequence was bombast and fustian and all extravagance.

After Dryden had wasted much of his strength on his rhyming tragedies, his opinions began to undergo a change, and, perhaps with a truer appreciation of Shakspeare, to perceive that the fashion he had so greatly encouraged was nothing more than a fashion. The prevalent dramatic style had been keenly satirized, in the famous parody, "The Rehearsal," by the witty and profligate Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, —Dryden being held up to chief ridicule in the prominent character of the dramatic author "Bayes." The sharp shaft pierced him, giving not a mortal but a poisoned wound; for Dryden reserved his vengeance for

the weighty blow he dealt to Buckingham some years after in his celebrated political satire. When the rhyme was relinquished and blank verse adopted by Dryden, in his later tragedies, his tone rose with the change; and now and then a passage may be discovered of admirable poetic cast.

Before dismissing the dramatic part of Dryden's career of authorship, two of his productions should be mentioned, as singularly illustrative of the perverted taste of the writer, and of those for whom he wrote. The first was his paraphrase of "Paradise Lost," which he traduced into a rhyming play, in five acts, entitled "The Fall of Innocence:"—a work the merit of which may be conjectured from the plan of it, and, to my mind, conclusive that Dryden could not have had a just appreciation of the great epic poet. I know there is an expression of Dryden's often quoted to prove his admiration of Milton; but there is also enough to show that he considered himself on this occasion as refining the matchless poem he was tampering with, and as giving it a polish and grace it stood in need of. A still bolder venture was when, jointly with Davenant, he undertook to *improve* Shakspeare's exquisite play, "The Tempest," and gave it the altered form which is still listened to in the theatres, doubtless, by not a few, as the real original production. This abuse of another of his unapproachable predecessors was also accompanied by words of admiration; for in the prologue he used the lines frequently quoted,—

"Shakspeare's magic could not copied be:  
Within that circle none durst walk but he."

But the sincerity of these words is scarcely to be reconciled with the ill-judged work they are prefaced to, of which it has been well said that not only "not one additional beauty has been inserted, not one felicitous hint improved, but the profound skill and knowledge of nature, for which the original has been justly praised, has been lost sight of by the improvers, who have stripped the spiritual creation of Shakspeare of its sky-tinctured robes, and stifled the wild harmony of its notes, in order that they might deck it in the artificial finery and bestow on it the conventional manners of their grosser times and their degraded theatre."

Sir Walter Scott has, with great truth, observed "how much the character and style of Shakspeare's and Dryden's dramas were influenced by the manners of the respective ages in which they lived, and the different audiences they were addressed to. The poor, small theatres in which Shakspeare's and Jonson's plays were represented

were filled with spectators who, though of the middle ranks, were probably worse educated than our more vulgar; but they came prepared with a tribute of tears and laughter to bursts of passion or effusions of wit, though incapable of estimating the beauties derived from the gradual development of a story, well-maintained characters, well-arranged incidents, and the minute beauties of language. Dryden, on the other hand, wrote what was to pass before the judgment of a monarch and his courtiers, professed judges of dramatic criticism, and a formidable band of town critics. Art, therefore, was not only a requisite qualification, but the principal attribute, of the dramatic poet. An exhibition of nature, in the strength of her wildest energies, as in 'Lear' and 'Othello,'—deep emotion, or sweet and simple pathos,—would have found no correspondent feeling in the bosoms of the selfish, the witty, the affected, and the critical audiences who preferred the ingenious, romantic, and polished:” and, therefore, Scott reasonably questions whether the age of Charles II. would have borne the introduction of Othello or Falstaff.

The miserable vassalage of Dryden to the theatre at last began at once to irritate and depress him; for he had a spirit which, if not elevated enough to save his talents from unworthy pursuits, did yet sooner or later awaken the painful sense of self-degradation. “I desire,” said he, “to be no longer the Sisyphus of the stage,—to roll up a stone with endless labour, which, to follow the proverb, *gathers no moss*, and which is perpetually falling down again.”

The ambition of an heroic poem was flitting across his mind. But from this he was called away to a different service; and it is vain to speculate what an epic poem from the pen of Dryden might have been. I can see little reason to regret that he was diverted from the attempt; for his imagination, with all its power in certain departments, was hardly capable of a long-sustained and requisite majesty. He was now to enlarge the domain of English poetry by the production of the most nervous political satire in the language. When the inquiry is made as to the ground of Dryden's poetical fame, he is found to be one of the poets whose reputation is not at once justified by a reference to any one *chief* production. It probably rests principally upon his great satire,—the poem of “Absalom and Achitophel.” The reign of Charles II. was a reign of political intrigue,—an effect or one form of its corruption. It was a period of plot and cabal, busy with the present and still busier with the future,—the question of the succession. It would consume more time than is at my command to recall the state of things which Dryden took as the occasion of his poem. It was levelled against the

scheme of Shaftesbury and his adherents to set aside the heir-presumptive to the throne and advance the interests of the king's natural son,—the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth. Political lampoons and satires were no novelties in the ephemeral literature of England; but such a satire as Dryden's was an engine of destruction such as had not been known before. It was like some of the weapons which are revolutionizing modern warfare, contrasted with the bow and arrow or the clumsy matchlock musket of olden times. The satire of Dryden had the merit of striking high as well as strongly,—having, however, it should be added, the royal encouragement to sanction its boldness, and some against whom it was levelled having fallen from their high station. The poem gave its author opportunity for his long-reserved retribution upon one who had made the first assault,—the Duke of Buckingham,—the satire of “*The Rehearsal*” being now repaid in a few lines, into which was compressed sarcasm a hundredfold multiplied. The character of Zimri, in which he represented Buckingham, was considered by the author himself as the masterpiece of his satire, and his own comment is the best statement of the admirable adroitness of the attack:—

“The character of Zimri, in my ‘*Absalom*,’ is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough; and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed, I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides and little extravagances, to which the wittier a man is he is generally the more obnoxious. It succeeded as I wished; the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began the frolic:—

“Some of their chiefs were princes of the land:  
 In the first rank of these did Zimri stand;  
 A man so various that he seem'd to be  
 Not one, but all mankind's epitome:  
 Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;  
 Was every thing by starts, and nothing long,  
 But, in the course of one revolving moon,  
 Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon;  
 Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,  
 Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.  
 Blest madman, who could every hour employ  
 With something new to wish or to enjoy!  
 Railing and praising were his usual themes,  
 And both, to show his judgment, in extremes,  
 So over-violent or over-civil,  
 That every man with him was god or devil.



In squandering wealth was his peculiar art,  
 Nothing went unrewarded but desert.  
 Beggar'd by fools, whom still he found too late,  
 He had his jest, and they had his estate ;  
 He laugh'd himself from court, then sought relief  
 By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief."

The finest skill of the satirist was shown in his choice of the vulnerable points of character. Buckingham was a cankered profligate, case-hardened in sensuality, with every moral feeling literally dead; and, therefore, if the satire had consisted of invective of his immorality, or exposure of what was already notorious,—his debauchery and vice,—it would have trickled off like drops of water on an oiled surface; but, as it was, it struck him, indurated as he was, like a shower of molten lead. Dryden well knew how encased his adversary was in the armour of a moral torpor; but he detected the joints of that armour, and there found space to thrust with his keen sword a desperate wound.

The grasp of Dryden's satire seized on some of his luckless contemporaries in authorship,—his small rivals in poetry,—who have gained a sinister immortality, owing all their fame to the stamp he put upon them,—such as Shadwell and poor Settle, who have come down to posterity in these lines:—

"Doeg, though without knowing how or why,  
 Made still a blundering kind of melody;  
 Spurr'd boldly on, and dash'd through thick and thin,  
 Through sense and nonsense, never out nor in;  
 Free from all meaning, whether good or bad,  
 And, in one word, heroically mad.  
 He was too warm on picking-work to dwell,  
 But fagoted his notions as they fell,  
 And, if they rhymed and rattled, all was well."

I cannot here omit noticing that a very wretched condition of literary society existed in Dryden's time; for there was a multitude of writers, many of them mere scribblers and versifiers, full of pretensions and empty of every manly principle and generous feeling,—mean, mercenary, and stupid, for ever on the alert to take unfair advantage of a fellow-labourer. When Dryden meditated an epic poem, he was carefully mysterious as to the intended subject of it; for what reason, do you suppose? Why, from the fear that it would be immediately seized and appropriated by some of the countless scribblers, and thus his design be forestalled by this curious species of literary larceny. How melancholy a contrast is this to that hearty and open-hearted intercourse which prevailed among the distinguished dramatic contemporaries of



Shakspeare,—those frank and happy festivities at the Mermaid Tavern, the tradition of which has been kept alive, and presents to our fancy the great dramatist, with Ben Jonson and Fletcher, Beaumont, Donne and Ford, and the rest, like a band of brothers. In Dryden's day there was envy and jealousy and malice, great and small,—each man's impulse selfishness. The time had nearly gone by for that amiable, fraternal feeling in literature,—the joint authorship,—such as carries the names of Beaumont and Fletcher inseparable and undistinguished to future generations.

In treating the powers of Dryden as a writer of satire, let me briefly notice what has occurred to me as a contrast with his illustrious predecessor, Milton. Like Dryden, Milton was involved in strife with men of the world and of letters, politicians and authors; he too had occasion for satire. But for that he deemed “the vision and the faculty divine” too sacred; and he poured forth his fierce denunciations and rebukes in *prose*. Bitter and sometimes coarse and vulgar words, which cannot but be deplored, broke from him, but never in his pure and majestic poetry. His Muse was too sacred to be profaned by this world's angry and fleeting passions. It is only over the stormy temper of Milton's *prose* that one of his most enthusiastic admirers has lamented in a noble sonnet. The lines are from an ardent lover of genius,—himself a man of genius,—the late Sir Egerton Brydges:—

“Not Milton's holy genius could secure  
In life his name from insult and from scorn,  
And taunts of indignation, foul as fall  
Upon the vilest tribe of human kind!  
Nor yet untainted could his heart endure  
The calumnies his patience should have borne;  
For words revengeful started at his call,  
And blotted the effulgence of his mind.  
But, oh! how frail the noblest soul of man!  
Not o'er aggressive blame the bard arose;  
His monarch's deeds 't was his with spleen to scan,  
And on his reign the gates of mercy close.  
He had a hero's courage; but, too stern,  
He could not soft submission's dictates learn.

I must hasten on from the satirical portion of Dryden's authorship, to notice, very briefly, some of his argumentative poems,—a species of poetry especially illustrating the two prime qualities of his poetry,—the power of reasoning in verse and a compressed vigour of style. Immediately after the accession of James II., when that prince's design of reconciling England to the Church of Rome became apparent, Dryden,

at a time most suspicious for his sincerity, suddenly declared himself a convert to Popery, and gave to his new alliance the allegorical poem "The Hind and the Panther," the longest of his original poems. The fable is fanciful, perhaps somewhat fantastic, in the device of conveying an elaborate theological controversy, as some simple moral is inculcated in *Æsop's* little parables. It has been remarked of Dryden that he reasoned better in verse than in prose. In this poem the reasoning is acute, with an intermixture of wit and the best flow of his versification. It is a statement, probably to their full advantage, of the arguments employed in favour of the infallibility of Romanism against an unsteady and ultra Protestantism. The hind, an immaculate and unoffending animal, was, to the fancy of the proselyte, a type of the purity and gentleness of the Church of Rome; the panther, a strong and beautiful but spotted beast, is the Church of England; and various other beasts are representatives of different sects,—the *quaking* hare, for instance, being the type of that worthy Society in which the poet finds naught else to censure but their scruples as to war and oaths. But the associates of his early days, the Presbyterians, find less mercy at the poet's hands; for their image "is a gaunt and hungry wolf, who pricks up his *predestinating* ears." While it is wiser, as well as more charitable, neither to coudemn Dryden's adoption of Roman Catholic tenets for insincerity, nor to ascribe it to sordid motives, it should be understood that it was not a conversion from any previous well-settled creed, but the movement of a mind which as yet had taken little heed to its hereafter. He found himself growing old, many precious years misspent in worthless, thankless, and dangerous pursuits, in the service and in the society of the dissolute and unprincipled, making sport for them, and displaying his God-given strength in literary gladiatorship; after a life busied in the thickest of the throng of a faithless generation, he began at last to have misgivings, and to feel, in the words of a truly moral poet who had gone before him,—

"That unless above himself he can  
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!"

He witnessed the ecclesiastical ferment of his times,—affairs of church entangled with affairs of state,—and his wearied and awakened spirit hastened from the apathy or restlessness of scepticism into the repose of absolute ecclesiastical infallibility. The whole course of the argument, in the poem, shows this, even if it were not pretty clearly avowed:—

"My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires;  
My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,  
Follow'd false lights; and when their glimpse was gone  
My pride struck out new sparkles of its own.

Such was I, such by nature still I am ;  
 Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame !  
 Good life be now my task : my doubts are done."

The opening lines of the "Hind and the Panther" have been reputed among the most musical in the language,—an opinion, however, entertained by those who have limited their sense of rhythm chiefly to the rhyme and the couplet :—

"A milk-white hind, immortal and unchanged,  
 Fed on the lawns and in the forest ranged ;  
 Without, unspotted, innocent within,  
 She fear'd no danger, for she knew no sin.  
 Yet had she oft been chased with horns and hounds,  
 And Scythian shafts ; and many wingéd wounds  
 Aim'd at her heart ; was often forced to fly,  
 And doom'd to death, though fated not to die.

\* \* \* \*

Panting and pensive, now she ranged alone  
 And wander'd in the kingdoms once her own ;  
 The common hunt, though from their rage restrain'd  
 By sovereign power, her company disdain'd ;  
 Grinn'd as they pass'd, and with a glaring eye  
 Gave gloomy signs of secret enmity.  
 'Tis true, she bounded by, and tripp'd so light,  
 They had not time to take a steady sight ;  
 For truth has such a face and such a mien  
 As, to be loved, needs only to be seen."

With the high eulogies on Dryden's odes, especially "Alexander's Feast," I confess myself unable to sympathize. While there is much of lyrical rapidity in it, there is an absence of lyrical dignity both in thought and language : it has somewhat too much of the bacchanalian strain and too much of the pettiness of a mere song to come up to the standard of a true ode.

In the course of this lecture I have had occasion to condemn the perversion of Dryden's genius to low and unhallowed purposes. There was not only the native licentiousness in many of his dramas, but a borrowed iniquity in not a few of his translations from ancient authors. His imagination did not, like Milton's, travel into Greek and Roman poetry to feed on the purity and wisdom to be found there, but gloated over its corruptions and obscenity, as if it were better to go to the Eternal City and there to delve in the tombs or beneath the mouldering arches of its sewers than to stand on the Capitoline and breathe the pure air under an Italian sky and blowing across the seven hills of Rome.

It was my intention to have attempted to draw a contrast between

the old age of Milton and Dryden, to each of them a season of solitude and worldly misfortune :—Milton's the noble, placid closing of a life spent "ever in his great Taskmaster's eye,"—the very darkness of blindness sanctified to his meditative spirit, as he sublimely imagined it, "the shadows of heavenly wings" falling upon his footsteps ;—Dryden's old age the remnant of a life worn out in his Egyptian bondage, embittered by the memory of talents spent in the thankless services of the meanest, most sordid and grovelling of earthly kings. This contrast was in my thoughts ; but, when I reflect on the lines I now in conclusion read, I find myself disarmed of the intention :—

' If joys hereafter must be purchased here  
 With loss of all that mortals hold so dear,  
 Then welcome infamy and public shame,  
 And, last, a long farewell to worldly fame !  
 'T is said with ease ; but oh, how hardly tried  
 By haughty souls to human honour tied !  
 Oh, sharp convulsive pangs of agonizing pride !  
 Down then, thou rebel, never more to rise !  
 And what thou didst, and dost, so dearly prize,—  
 That fame, that darling fame,—make that thy sacrifice ;  
 'T is nothing thou hast given ; then add thy tears  
 For a long race of unrepenting years :  
 'T is nothing yet, yet all thou hast to give ;  
 Then add those may-be years thou hast to live :  
 'T is nothing still ; then poor and naked come ;  
 Thy Father will receive his unthrift home,  
 And thy blest Saviour's blood discharge the mighty sum."



## LECTURE IX.

### The Age of Queen Anne: Pope;

AND

### Poets of the later part of the Eighteenth Century: Cowper.

THE AGE OF POPE—CHANGE IN THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF AUTHORS—LANGUAGE OF DEDICATIONS—PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS—STATE OF BRITISH PARTIES—LORD MAHON'S ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE AGE—SPIRIT OF THAT AGE—ALEXANDER POPE—HIS ASPIRATIONS—HIS WANT OF SYMPATHY WITH HIS PREDECESSORS—IMITATION OF FRENCH POETRY—POPE'S EDITION OF SHAKSPEARE—POPE'S PASTORALS—CORRUPTIONS OF THE ENGLISH TONGUE—JOHN DENNIS'S EMENDATIONS OF SHAKSPEARE—POPE'S VERSIFICATION—THE "TOWN"—THE MOONLIGHT SCENE IN THE ILIAD—POPE AND MILTON CONTRASTED—"ELOISA TO ABELARD"—THE "RAPE OF THE LOCK"—POPE'S SATIRES—THE "ESSAY ON CRITICISM"—THE "ESSAY ON MAN"—LORD BOLINGBROKE—ORTHODOXY OF THE "ESSAY ON MAN"—HIS APPRECIATION OF FEMALE CHARACTER—WILLIAM COWPER—HIS INSANITY—"THE TASK"—"JOHN GILPIN"—"THE DIRGE"—"THE CASTAWAY"—"COWPER'S GRAVE."

THE lecture on Dryden has brought our studies down to the close of the seventeenth century, his death having its date in the year 1700. A literary era of great brilliancy soon followed in the early years of the eighteenth century,—the age of Queen Anne, as it has been styled,—of the poetry of which Pope stands, by universal admission, the representative—enjoying very much the same exclusive supremacy as had been attained by his immediate predecessor, Dryden, in his days. The age has its distinctive traits, political, moral, and social, affecting its literature; and Pope lived in close and strong sympathy with the times. He was, though devoted to the prime pursuit of literary fame, intimately associated with the actors and the scenes of public life. His reputation was speedy and brilliant. The real worth of it has been much discussed within the last few years,—a discussion, however, in which, except with a few ultraists, there is less real difference of opinion than zeal of controversy.

Before entering upon any statement of these opinions, I wish to notice a change which, at this time, was taking place in the social relations of authors,—their position in the community. The condition of literature has in different moods of society, by this consideration, been materially



controlled, taking a character from outward agencies. In the earlier ages of English authorship, the poets, when seeking the favour and countenance of men of rank, conciliated their patronage by tributes which were no less honourable to him that gave than to him who received; for the language of dedication was a manly language, wholly free from servility. What, for instance, could be finer than the magnificent series of dedications of Spenser's "Fairy Queen,"—the affectionate and dutiful homage of a heart—a true poet's heart—for ever seeking the good and the honourable and the beautiful, wherever his imagination dwelt? The poet and the man of true nobility appear not to have been separated by any strongly-marked line of social demarcation: there was equal and honourable intimacy. Coming down to a later period, writers are seen pitifully fawning upon the great, the rich, and the powerful; an adulation poisonous to the love of truth and independence becomes a deep-seated and wide-spread disease. The boundless extravagance of Dryden's flattery is one of the moral blots upon his memory. What was a poet's function, in that sensual generation, but to feed an impure and palsied taste, for ever demanding stronger and stronger stimulants? His position had scarce more of moral elevation than that of a court buffoon, rising higher only when called to render a vassal's service in some fugitive quarrel of his master's, and to provide weapons from the arsenal of poetic satire. A better state of things was brought about in the succeeding period. The press was beginning to acquire an influence over public opinion which greatly affected the circumstances of men who were competent to write. The introduction of periodical publications may be referred to the reign of Queen Anne; and political leaders soon felt how great must be the sway upon public measures, and the policy of the two great parties, of discussion thus circulated. It has been well remarked, in reference to the fact of Lord Bolingbroke and the Lord-Chancellor Cowper having contributed to certain periodical publications, that two such statesmen, taking such a course, must have perceived the full extent of this influence. The power of a party-press was realized, and Whigs and Tories, Ministry and Opposition, rallied men of letters in their respective ranks. The man of letters, of course, rose in estimation; his social position was a better one. His attitude was not indeed as advantageous—not as propitious, I mean—to the genial activity of his powers, as that which existed under the affectionate, generous, and uncalculating relation between the early poets and their patrons and friends. Far less is it to be compared with that lofty independence maintained by Milton; but assuredly far better than such a state of things as degraded most of the

authors whose misfortune it was to have their lot cast under the dominion of the later Stuart kings. The period now under review was a palmy one for men who held a pen of power. This was a new condition of English literature, arising from the state of British parties and the expansion of the periodical press. It has been well illustrated by Lord Mahon in his agreeable history of that period:—"During the reigns of William, of Anne, and of George I., till 1721, when Walpole became prime minister, the Whigs and Tories vied with each other in the encouragement of learned and literary men. Whenever a writer showed signs of genius, either party to which his principles might incline him was eager to hail him as a friend. The most distinguished society and the most favourable opportunities were thrown open to him. Places and pensions were showered down in lavish profusion: those who wished only to pursue their studies had the means afforded them for learned leisure, while more ambitious spirits were pushed forward in Parliament or diplomacy. In short, though the sovereign was never an Augustus, every minister was a Mæcenas. Newton became Master of the Mint, Locke was a commissioner of appeals, Steele was a commissioner of stamps, Stepney, Prior, and Gay were employed in lucrative and important embassies. It was a slight piece of humour at his outset, and, at his introduction, the 'City and Country Mouse,' that brought forth a mountain of honours to Montagne, afterwards Earl of Halifax and First Lord of the Treasury. When Parnell first came to court, Lord-Treasurer Oxford passed through the crowd of nobles, leaving them all unnoticed, to greet and welcome the poet. 'I value myself,' says Swift, 'upon making the ministry desire to be acquainted with Parnell, and not Parnell with the ministry.' Swift himself became Dean of St. Patrick's, and but for the queen's dislike would have been Bishop of Hereford. Pope, as a Roman Catholic, was debarred from all places of honour or emolument; yet Secretary Craggs offered him a pension of £300 a year, not to be known by the public, and to be paid from the secret service-money. In 1714, General Stanhope carried a bill providing a most liberal reward for the discovery of the longitude; Addison became secretary of state; Tickell was secretary in Ireland; several rich sinecures were bestowed on Congreve, and Rowe, and Hughes, and Ambrose Phillips."

It is necessary to be cautious, lest we conclude too hastily that the moral improvement of men of letters kept pace with their social improvement. Their elevation in society in consequence of the spread of political literature had indeed brought with it a certain kind of independence, which secured to them a certain dignity in public estimation; but

it seems to me that they were too much entangled in associations alien to a pure and elevated literature. Even with that increased independence, there was still preserved a system of patronage such as gave to the Earl of Halifax the reputation of the Mæcenæ of the age, and to which authors found it expedient to pay court. These were influences not propitious to the higher aspirations of genius.

The age of Queen Anne was an age distinguished for its courtly refinement, in comparison at least with the grossness which had been so predominant a few years before. The unclean spirit had gone out, but it walked in dry places; during the early reigns of the eighteenth century, England seems to have been in the condition of a relapse. There was a heartlessness in the nation, in all its leading classes, in the Church, in the State, and among its writers. The lofty character of the statesman was lowered to that of the politician, and the inspired bard became chiefly studious of a polished diction and a nicely-balanced verse. The great political parties of a former age had dwindled into tangled factions. Venality had become a prevalent vice, and the current of public affairs was stirred less by the agitation of deep principles than by petty intrigues. Men had lost their magnanimity; and in its stead they trusted to small expedients and large pretensions. Ascendency was held by wits and freethinkers and shallow philosophers.

After these general notices of the spirit of those times, it is my purpose to look at its influence upon English poetry, as it may be traced in the poems of its representative during almost the first half of the eighteenth century,—Alexander Pope.

Intimately as Pope was associated with men in prominent and active public life, his career was essentially a literary one. The cause to which he devoted all his cares and labours was the acquisition and guardianship of his reputation as an author. Sir Walter Scott has pointed out the striking contrast in this particular between Pope and his robust-minded friend, Dean Swift, who seems to have disdained the character of a mere man of letters, and to have been careless of his works beyond their mere occasional use. Scott himself had a touch of Swift's character in this particular, and has therefore pointedly adverted to what he regarded as a weakness in Pope's moral and intellectual constitution.

"Pope's character and habits," he remarks, "were exclusively literary, with all the hopes, fears, and failings which are attached to that feverish occupation,—a restless pursuit of poetical fame. Without domestic society or near relations, separated by weak health and personal disadvantages from the gay,—by fineness of mind and lettered indolence from the busy part of mankind, surrounded only by a few

friends who valued those gifts in which he excelled, Pope's whole hopes, wishes, and fears were centred in his literary reputation. To extend his fame he laboured indirectly as well as directly, and to defend it from the slightest attack was his daily and nightly anxiety. Hence the restless impatience which that distinguished author displayed under the libels of dunces whom he ought to have despised; and hence, too, the venomous severity with which he retorted their puny attacks."

Now, in such a career it is at once manifest that there is an absence of the magnanimity of a great poet's soul. The highest aspiration of Pope's ambition was the acquisition of fame at the hands of the generation he was living with. He was surrounded by men of talents, of wit and accomplishments, men of the world, men of the town; and he deemed their praises all that a poet need desire. Their admiration was the voucher to him for his fame. He does not seem to have looked above or beyond the companionship of his own generation, as if never doubting that their judgment must be echoed by posterity. His hopes were centred in the approval of his contemporaries, and he bent his efforts to earn a speedy popularity with them. It has been nobly said of Milton that "his soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." An imagination shining, starlike, brightly and loftily would have probably shone in vain upon the generation in which Pope's lot was cast. Of him it may be said that the light of his genius had more of worldly kindling; it dwelt not apart, but glittered nearly, clearly, and gayly, like a ball-room lamp.

Pope's aspirations were crowned with success beyond all parallel. He gained during his lifetime, and therefore for his own personal enjoyment, a wider and more brilliant reputation than had been attained by any English poet who had preceded him,—a reputation still cherished in the constant admiration of many of our elders, who find in his well-turned and well-tuned and well-pointed lines their favourite quotations. It is my duty now to endeavour to ascertain how that reputation was acquired, and to measure its real height apart from all prepossessions and prejudices.

Let me in the first place remark that Pope's heart, whatever professions of admiration may have occasionally fallen from him, was not with any of his most illustrious predecessors. His path was a continuation of that which had been trod by Dryden. The process begun by that poet, of giving to English poetry the polish of French versification, was to be completed by Pope. He began his career of authorship under the persuasion that his country, while it had produced several great poets, had no great poet that was *correct*; and to supply that deficiency



was his study and the aim of his whole course. Apart from Shakspeare, whose genius was a law to itself, it is an interesting fact that each of the great poets fortified his powers by affectionate study of the imagination of his great English predecessors. Spenser has told of his obligations to Chaucer, "the father" of our poetry; and Milton was the student of both Chaucer and Spenser. But Dryden and Pope looked to Continental poetry, with something of repugnance to the insular barbarism of their poetical ancestry: they fashioned their imaginations after the French models, forgetting that in thus copying traits which were natural to France they were smoothing away the bold and distinctive features of their native poetry. It was applying to the fresh and ruddy complexion of the English Muse cosmetics and artificial colour. The imitation was avowed and justified by Pope:—

"We conquer'd France, but felt our captive's charms;  
 Her arts victorious triumph'd o'er our arms;  
 Britain to soft refinement less a foe,  
 Wit grew polite, and numbers learn'd to flow.  
 Waller was smooth; but Dryden taught to join  
 The varying verse, the full, resounding line,  
 The long majestic march and energy divine.  
 Though still some traces of our rustic vein  
 And splay-foot verse remain'd, and will remain  
 Late, very late, correctness grew our care,  
 When the tired nation breathed from civil war;  
 Exact Racine and Corneille's noble fire  
 Show'd us that France had something to admire  
 Not but the tragic spirit was our own,  
 And full in Shakspeare, fair in Otway, shone;  
 But Otway fail'd to polish or refine,  
 And fluent Shakspeare scarce effaced a line:  
 E'en copious Dryden wanted or forgot  
 The last and greatest art,—the art to blot."

When Pope began his career, the field, it seems to me, was open to the ready accomplishment of his ambition; for the best and earlier English poetry had no more place in the affections of his contemporaries than in his own. How low must have been their appreciation of Shakspeare is in some measure shown by that most remarkable edition of the great dramatist's works,—Pope's edition,—in which he introduced throughout, in the margin, certain marks, intended to point out what he called the most *shining* passages. There were many men who thought like Lord Chesterfield, who said that he was obliged to take snuff when he read "Paradise Lost,"—the small wit of which remark I am not sure that I distinctly see; but I suppose it meant that he needed some



stimulus to keep him awake during the effort. Pope showed an instinctive knowledge of the age he was writing for when he made it a chief object to give to English versification a polish and a smoothness surpassing what had been before attained,—not, indeed, transcending the harmony to be often found, but a harmony of unequalled uniformity, free from even occasional harshness. This he was enabled to accomplish partly by elaborate finish and partly by his natural endowment of a correct ear. Versification had been a spontaneous delight in childhood with him: he

“Lisp’d in numbers, for the numbers came.”

The poet introduced himself to public observation by his “Pastorals.” These poems could scarcely be read now with any interest even by a zealous admirer of Pope. They had, however, a success that fixed the character of his poetry. The public ear was fascinated with the unbroken flow of the verse and the unwonted refinement of the diction.

This refining process has influenced so much of English writing that I wish to notice the changes style underwent during the latter part of the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth century. In the years of the Restoration, the language lost much of its purity and its native tone by two opposite corruptions: one, the adoption of very easy and vulgarly-colloquial expressions,—an infection which touched even some of the most celebrated pulpit oratory, a freedom and coarseness of diction denominated *slang*, a word belonging to the very vocabulary it denotes. The other corruption was owing to a mistaken notion of refinement,—a squeamishness in using native strong idiomatic English forms of expression. Dryden gave a sanction to this affectation of a misplaced precision, which I may exemplify by mentioning his determination to correct as faulty and inelegant his use of the Anglicism of ending a sentence with a preposition; changing, for example, the phrase “I cannot think so contemptibly of the age I live in” into “the age in which I live.”

The poets and the critics of this period manifestly prided themselves on superior skill in poetic *art*, and disparaged their greater predecessors for a semi-barbarian rudeness. This was Dryden’s habit of opinion; it was Pope’s; and, to show how general it was, one of the chief victims of Pope’s satire in the “Dunciad,” John Dennis, gave his care to refining what he thought unsightly irregularities in Shakspeare’s drama. The historical play of “Coriolanus” came forth doubly refined under the process, presenting a feebleness of paraphrase woefully contrasted with the original. “The icicle that hangs on Dian’s temple” is made “the icicle that hangs on the temple of Diana.”

The Roman's fond expression of constancy to his wife,—

“ That kiss  
I earried from thee, dear, and my true lip  
Hath virgin'd it e'er since,”—

is evaporated in these more polished and mawkish words :—

“ That kiss  
I carried from my love, and my true lip  
Hath ever since preserved it like a virgin.”

And, to take one more example, who would recognise in this furbished and feeble version,—

“ This boy, that, like an eagle in a dovecote,  
Flutter'd a thousand Volces in Corioli,  
And did it without second or acquittance,  
Thus sends their mighty chief to mourn in hell,”—

who could recognise the natural burst of mingled triumph and indignation when Coriolanus is taunted with the word “ boy ” ?—

“ Boy !—False hound !  
If you have writ your annals true, 't is there,  
That, like an eagle in a doveeote, I  
Flutter'd your Volces in Corioli :  
Alone I did it.—Boy ! ”

I notice this propensity to give a high-wrought polish both to diction and metre, because, while it was, I doubt not, the fashion of the times, no one gave more pains to the process than Pope. His versification is entitled to all praise for its exquisite smoothness and beauty of sound, though limited almost entirely to one species of verse, in which he displayed his skill as a metrist. The couplet which of all others is said to have best satisfied his own ear is the following, in the “ Dunciad : ”—

“ Lo ! where Macotis sleeps, and hardly flows  
The freezing Tanais through a waste of snows.”

The pages of Pope abound also in felicitous combinations of words, phrases commended to the memory and impressed there by their beauty, which is one of the reasons his lines are so frequently quoted. It would be scarcely possible to find words more happily chosen and more aptly combined than in his well-known expression,—one among many of the same description,—

“ To snatch a grace beyond the reach of art.”

The success of Pope's early poems misled him into a belief which could not fail to be fatal to him as a descriptive poet of external nature. He found, from the reception of his “ Pastorals,” that people were willing to be pleased with a poetry purporting to be descriptive, in

which there was in truth no description of nature either actual or imaginative. The greatest of the poets had been dutiful and affectionate in the study of nature; and the bounteous recompense was that nature ministered to them. So was it with Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakspeare; and with Milton, filling the storehouse of his fancy with treasures that were to last during the famine of incurable blindness. A change came over the spirit of poetry under the dynasty of Dryden, and still more of his follower—follower in time and in poetic theory—Pope. A style of description grew fashionable which betrayed that their communion with nature was not direct, thoughtful, and imaginative, but through the medium of books, and verbal and fantastic. It has been well said that "when Milton lost his eyes, Poetry lost hers." A time followed when our poets ceased to commune with nature and ceased to love her, and, as there can be no true knowledge without love, ceased therefore to know anything about her. Man again became all in all, but not the ideal human nature of Greek poetry in its altitudes of action and passion,—the human nature of what was called the *town*, with all its pettinesses and hollownnesses and crookednesses and rottennesses. The great business and struggle of men seemed to be to out-lie, out-cheat, and out-hector each other. Our poets then dwelt in Grub Street, and, to judge from their works, seldom left their garrets, save to go to the coffee-house, the play-house, and other polluted places. Dryden wrote a bombastic description of night, from which one might suppose that he had never seen night except by candle-light. He talked of "nature's self seeming to lie dead;" of "the mountains seeming to nod their drowsy heads,"—much as Charles II. used to do at a sermon;—and of "sleeping flowers *sweating* beneath the night-dews." Yet this was extolled by Rymer, a countryman of Shakspeare's, as the finest description of night ever composed,—an opinion which Johnson quotes without expressing any dissent, telling us, moreover, that these lines were oftener repeated in his days than almost any other of Dryden's. What, then, must have been the knowledge of nature, and what the feeling for it, in an age when the poetical imagery which the readers and repeaters of poetry were accustomed to associate with night, was nature's lying dead, mountains nodding their drowsy heads, and sleeping flowers sweating beneath the night-dews? People even learned to fancy and to tell one another that all this was indeed so. As it is the wont of hollow things to echo, whenever a poet hit on a striking image or a startling expression, it was bandied from mouth to mouth. Thus, "nodding mountains" became a stock phrase, a piece of falsetto, which passed from Dryden to Pope.

This once-celebrated description (and I have seen it quoted, even within a few years past, as an example of Dryden's peculiar felicity in describing repose) is in these vague, inflated, and unmeaning lines :—

“ All things are hush'd, as nature's self lay dead ;  
The mountains seem to nod their drowsy head ;  
The little birds in dreams their songs repeat,  
And sleeping flowers beneath the night-dews sweat.”

This passage has lost its celebrity ; but there is a passage of Pope's which has held its place in public admiration much longer,—his translation of the celebrated moonlight scene in the *Iliad*,—showing an equal disregard of the most obvious appearances of nature ; for, though he had Homer to guide him, the lines have been justly condemned as throughout false and contradictory :—

“ As when the moon—refulgent lamp of night—  
O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light,  
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,  
And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene ;  
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,  
And stars unnumber'd gild the glowing pole ;  
O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,  
And tipt with silver every mountain's head :  
Then shune the vales ; the rocks in prospect rise ;  
A flood of glory bursts from all the skies ;  
The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,  
Eye the blue vault, and bless the useful light.”

“ Here,” said Mr. Southey in a pithy comment on this passage, “ are the planets rolling round the moon ; here is the pole gilt and glowing with stars ; here are trees made yellow and mountains tipped with silver by the moonlight, and here is the whole sky in a flood of glory :—appearances not to be found either in Homer or in nature. Finally, these gilt and glowing skies, at the very time when they are thus pouring forth a flood of glory, are represented as a blue vault ! The astronomy in these lines would not appear more extraordinary to Dr. Herschell than the imagery to every person who has observed moonlight scenes.” “ Strange,” it has been well said, too,—“ strange to think of an enthusiast, as may have been the case with thousands, reciting these verses under the cope of a moonlight sky, without having his raptures in the least disturbed by a suspicion of their absurdity !” I have alluded to these passages to show how, in this school of poetry, its masters, Dryden, and, perhaps still more, Pope, could bring themselves to think the visible universe as of little consequence to a poet. Fidelity to nature—the truthfulness which distinguished the elder poets



—was banished as worthless, and fine words and smooth verses were the substitute.

The nature that Pope loved and admired was such an artificial nature as he had formed for himself in his famous grotto at Twickenham. It seems to me typical of his poetry so far as that poetry purported to be descriptive; especially when I fancy him seated there attired in the costume of Queen Anne's days, laced tightly in the stays he was obliged to wear on account of the weakness of his figure, his tie-wig pushed a little on one side, as his portrait represents him, or with a velvet cap on his head, his grotto composed of marbles, spars, gems, ores, and minerals. When I fancy him there eating sweetmeats, or conversing with Lord Bolingbroke, catching his philosophy from that nobleman, the poet thus fancied seems to me the very incarnation of his poetry. How contrasted, let me add, with the tradition of Milton's personal appearance, equally typical, clad in simple dress, a gray coarse cloth coat, and seated at the door of his residence near Moorgate, in warm, sunny weather, to enjoy the fresh air or the affectionate and reverential visit of some friend of simple habits of life like his own! In *his* heart a strong and unadulterated love of nature always had its indwelling; for, when old and blind, all that was left was the pure enjoyment of the fresh air, touching his noble brow and fanning the flowing hair that was parted on it, bringing too, no doubt, recollections of his suburban rambles and the happy rural home at Horton.

But Pope's reputation rests less at the present day on his *descriptive* poetry than upon his satires and his moral poems, besides his heroic-comical poem, the "Rape of the Lock," and the "Eloisa to Abelard." In the latter poem there are evidences of higher efforts of imagination than Pope has shown in any other of his poems; but, unfortunately, his imagination was employed upon a theme of which the grossness has been heightened in his hands, notwithstanding the dazzling veil interposed of exquisitely-finished verse. Of the "Rape of the Lock" I acknowledge my inability of admiration. It always seems to me a piece of raillery wonderfully overwrought and with very little of comic force under its heroic cover. I can enter most heartily, as I hope to be able to show you, into the enjoyment of Burns's elfin creations,—the folks that Tam O'Shanter met at Kirk-Alloway,—or in Shakspeare's fairy world, the realms and the subjects of Oberon and Titania, Puck and the other merry wanderers of the night keeping their quaint and moonlight revels, following darkness like a dream, singing fairy songs, and,

"By pavéd fountain, or by rushy brook,  
Or on the beachéd margent of the sea,  
Dancing their ringlets to the whistling wind."



But, as for the ball-room elves, the sylphs of the "Rape of the Lock," Pope's Zephyrettas and Momentillas, Brillantes and Crispissas, it is essential artifice: they are a sort of brocade-and-hooped fairies; there is no nature, no life in them.

The satirical poems of Pope show great powers in that department of poetry. His satire is a weapon of greater keenness and polish but less weight than Dryden's. The famous character of Addison is an admirable specimen of Pope's best satirical discrimination and skill:—

"Pææ to all such! But were there one whose fires  
True genius kindles and fair fame inspires,  
Bless'd with each talent and each heart to please,  
And born to write, converse, and live with ease,—  
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,  
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne;  
View him with scornful yet with jealous eyes,  
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise;  
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;  
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike;  
First hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;  
Alike reserved to blame or to commend,—  
A timorous foe, and a suspicious friend;  
Dreading e'en fools, by flatterers besieged,  
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged;  
Like Cato, gives his little senate laws,  
And sits attentive to his own applause;  
While wits and templars every sentence raise,  
And wonder with a foolish face of praise:—  
Who but must laugh if such a man there be?  
Who would not weep if Atticus were he?"

This passage shows Pope's talent for satire to better advantage, it seems to me, than any of his bitter and vehement invectives or the witty sarcasm which abounds in the "Dunciad."

The reputation of Pope has been considerable as a philosophic and moral poet. His philosophic poems are the "Essay on Criticism" and the "Essay on Man," with the supplementary essays. The former was a youthful production with but a small proportion of imaginative spirit, having been first written in prose and then translated into verse. It is a poem which supplies frequent quotations of commonplace truisms in metre, conveniently remembered; such as

"A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."

The "Essay on Man" is a more elaborate metaphysical poem, with

a high design and a comprehensive scope,—a system of ethics deduced from considerations of the nature and state of man in his various relations. To criticise the execution of this plan and measure its consistency with Christian philosophy cannot now be attempted. Let me only remark, I find it impossible, in reading the poem, to divest my mind of the recollection of the source of the philosophical views to which Pope gave the popularity of verse. By whom was the design of the poem prompted? by whom its theory and arguments dictated? to whom was it dedicated? and whose praises are interwoven with it as the author's "friend," his "genius," "master of the poet and the song," his "guide and philosopher"? To Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke! And who and what was Lord Bolingbroke? He was one whose name was most prominent in both the literary and political circles of society during the reign of Queen Anne and the first of the Brunswick race of English kings. His youth had been severely trained under a preceptor whom he afterwards sneeringly styles a puritanical parson who made one hundred and nineteen sermons on the 119th Psalm. His early manhood recoiled into the excesses of a libertine; he became a sceptic, priding himself upon the sufficiency of an infidel philosophy; and, when political reverse cast him down from the high place of power and honours into exile and disgrace, he boastfully proclaimed that virtue could find a home on any soil. But his philosophy did not avail him: he pined in a foreign land, a miserable outcast, craving his lost influence and station. The mind of Pope dwelt in the shadow of Bolingbroke's. Now, how could it, thus overshadowed, the light of revelation thus intercepted by the dark and restless leaves of the poisonous tree of a faithless philosophy,—“philosophy falsely so called,”—how could it have other than a stunted growth? The whole body of the “Essay on Man” was Bolingbroke's; and Pope's function was to give it the outward garb of verse,—to give it wings to fly into hearts it never otherwise would have reached. It is utterly impossible to reconcile the notion of Pope's being an author of an exalted and powerful genius, with the mere ministerial relation in which he was content and happy to stand to Bolingbroke, and such a man who well earned the epithet given in Shakspeare to an earlier one of the same name,—“the *cankered* Bolingbroke.” The poet worshipped the philosopher as his genius:—yes, but unhappily the genius was but a ministering spirit of evil. Like Satan close at the ear of Eve, the infidel was at the poet's side,—

“Assaying by his devilish art to reach  
The organs of his fancy.”

When the consistency of the reasoning in Pope's poem with Revelation was questioned, I know that strong men, Warburton among them, were ready to indicate its orthodoxy; but I greatly fear there was something in the constitution of Pope's mind which fitted it for the reception of the seeds of Bolingbroke's philosophy. How far the poet was a dutiful child of the Roman Catholic Church I cannot undertake to judge; but a strange kind of faith it must have been when such a sentiment as this passed between him and his noble friend. In Bolingbroke's elaborate letter to Pope, he says, "You quoted to me once, with great applause, an apophthegm:—'Where mystery begins, religion ends.'"<sup>1</sup> What a poor thing would religion be if its depths were shallows to be sounded by the scant line of such philosophy as Bolingbroke's! It is just to add that Pope did not himself realize the full extent of the principles he was thus taught; and I can well believe there was lurking in Bolingbroke's callous heart the infidel scorn at the poet's deluded innocence, beholding him swallowing the poison unawares. Whatever interpretation may be put on the poem to reconcile it with Revelation, certain it is that it contains nothing to which Bolingbroke, infidel as he was, could not have given his whole consent. What but the deistical fallacy of the sufficiency of natural religion, as it is called, and the equally sophistical sentiment of a spurious liberality, is in these lines?—

"Slave to no sect, who takes no private road,  
But looks through nature up to nature's God."

Or, again, how unsound are those lines so often quoted with unthinking approval!

"For forms of government let fools contest;  
Whate'er is best administer'd is best.  
For modes of faith let senseless zealots fight;  
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

As if the administration of a government did not greatly depend upon its form; as if the rectitude of life did not depend on its faith.

One great fault in the constitution of Pope's mind was the excess of a dangerous element:—the proneness to satire. It is dangerous in any mind,—man's or woman's,—the love of saying disagreeable things, the small shafts of which some people always carry their quiver full,—the tendency to criticise, to detect faults; it is dangerous above all to the poet, for it lowers the tone of his enthusiasm, by drawing his thoughts away from the grand and good and beautiful. In any one—poet or other—it brings its own penalty; for it closes at last many sources of pure enjoyment, sacrificing the happiness of delight to the poor pleasure of

critical acuteness. In the worst moral character which Shakspeare has created, he has made the disproportionate excess of satirical temper a large element. "I am nothing," exclaims Iago, "if not critical." Throughout Pope's poems runs an almost uninterrupted vein of satire in some of its forms: it has penetrated even the epitaphs he has written. He scarcely ever touches the character of woman without reproach,—some expression of unmanly contempt or direct insult. How different from that lofty, chastened sentiment of admiration and love which breathes on the pages of every one of our truly great poets! In this, as in other respects, what men, what perfect gentlemen, they were! I say this not by way of gallantry, but because I have not the least doubt that it is an element in the true poetic character. Observation on the chief English poets would verify it as a fact; and, if there was time, I believe I could state the theory of it. But, passing that by, Pope seems to have had no correct appreciation of female character. The only woman towards whom he ever entertained anything approaching a tender passion was, indeed, more of a man than a woman,—Lady Mary Wortley Montague. The text of his celebrated epistle on the character of women was,—

"Most women have no characters at all,"—

a piece of sarcasm the sting of which has been admirably extracted by one who was as full of gentleness of heart as of genius,—the late Mr. Coleridge. "'Most women have no characters at all,' said Pope, and meant it for satire. Shakspeare, who knew men and women much better, saw that it, in fact, was the perfection of women to be characterless, as Desdemona and Ophelia."

I am not a frequent reader of Pope's poetry, for the simple reason that I am not an earnest admirer of it: as this lecture has probably shown, my heart is not in it. I will say with all candour, that I have had difficulty in duly appreciating it in close contrast with the superior poetry that has gone before. While preparing this lecture, I have chanced to light upon some notes made several years ago, after reading Pope's poems, and amidst a variety of very crude and puerile criticism I find one expression which, full as it is of boyish fervour, is yet not inappropriate to my more recent examination of the same poetry. The words were simply these:—"I cannot raise my admiration of Pope very high, because I have just come *hot* from Milton."

A short space, I believe, remains before I reach the verge to which I venture to tax your patience. The injurious influence of Pope's poetry in enfeebling English poetry, confirmed as it was by that very

exceptionable book of its kind, Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," and the first signs of the gradual regeneration of imaginative literature in the latter part of the century, are subjects I must seek some opportunity to notice in a subsequent lecture. In that regeneration no one shared more largely than William Cowper,—a true poet, well inspired and well disciplined by the study of one of the chief masters of English song. I had it in my heart to examine with you Cowper's whole career with affectionate attention; but the limits of my course will not permit more than a few allusions, which, I fear, will be as unsatisfactory to you as, surely, they are to myself. His story, however, is a familiar one; his poetry, closely interwoven with it, is familiar too. The great value of Cowper's poetry consists in its departure from the French school of English verse. Milton was his youthful, his life-long admiration and model:—

"Then Milton had indeed a poet's charms:  
New to my taste, his Paradise surpass'd  
The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue  
To speak its excellence. I danced for joy.  
I marvell'd much that, at so ripe an age  
As twice seven years, his beauties had then first  
Engaged my wonder, and, admiring still  
And still admiring, with regret supposed  
The joy half lost because not sooner found."

Cowper's early writings were love-verses, meant only for the eye of his fair cousin, who had won his heart and gave her own in return, though they were doomed soon to be parted for ever during their long lives. The mysterious malady which during fifty years was the affliction of his life came on in prime manhood. It would have a fearful interest to trace its progress from its first intimations, and the fitful, self-frustrating attempt at suicide, to his residence in a madhouse, and the several relapses in after-years. It might be done without the wantonness of holding "vain dalliance with the misery even of the dead;" but it must suffice to say that it was insanity in its most appalling form,—utter hopelessness of the salvation of his soul,—the monomania of the desperate dread of eternal misery. In the very tumult of his first attack he describes his own condition in a few verses, the most agonized, probably, that ever fell from poet's pen; some of them too distressing to be repeated; the wildness increased by the Sapphic measure, strange in English verse:—

"Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,  
Scarce can endure delay for execution,—  
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my  
Soul in a moment.



Man disavows and Deity disowns me;  
 Hell might afford my miseries a shelter,  
 Therefore, hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all  
                     Bolted against me."

When *bodily* darkness fell on the footsteps of Milton, he imagined it the overshadowing of heavenly wings; and we might ascribe to a like cause the *spiritual* darkness of poor Cowper's days. The gloomy thought that had taken possession of him was never relinquished; but often it seemed to fade away into the unreal wretchedness of a distressing dream. Happiness was ministered to him in various forms. He found contentment in humble occupations,—the innocent amusement of some work of mechanism or the playful companionship of the pet animals he has immortalized. Friends, the kindest and most constant man was ever blessed with, were providentially raised up, one after another, to watch over him.

Criticism could find few better themes than to examine the character of Cowper's poetry,—to show it always pure and gentle, though sometimes overcast by the melancholy of his malady or of a sombre theology, and occasionally rising from its usual familiar range to a region of sublimity. There is great interest, too, in tracing how his imagination extracted melody from his madness,—the evil spirit that troubled him charmed to rest by the harpings of his Muse. But I can notice only the most beautiful of his minor poems. It was Cowper's misfortune to lose his mother before he was six years of age. A picture of her was sent to him when he was nearly sixty years old. At the sight of it there started up images and recollections and feelings which had slept for more than half a century. Time and forgetfulness were baffled by a sister art; and the work was completed by Poetry in as touching lines as ever recorded the movements of a poet's memory into the shadowy region of childhood:—

"Oh that those lips had language! Life has pass'd  
 With me but roughly since I heard thee last.  
 Those lips are thine. Thy own sweet smile I see,—  
 The same that oft in childhood solaced me.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

Now, while that face renews my filial grief,  
 Fancy shall weave a charm for my relief,  
 Shall steep me in Elysian reverie,—  
 A momentary dream that thou art she.

My mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,  
 Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?  
 Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son?  
 Wretch even then,—life's journey just begun!

Perhaps thou gavest me, though unfelt, a kiss,—  
 Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss.  
 Ah! that maternal smile! it answers, Yes!  
 I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial-day,  
 I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,  
 And, turning from my nursery window, drew  
 A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!  
 But was it such? It was. Where thou art gone,  
 Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown!  
 May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,  
 The parting word shall pass my lips no more!  
 Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern,  
 Oft gave me promise of thy quick return.  
 What ardently I wish'd I long believed,  
 And, disappointed still, was still deceived;  
 By expectation every day beguiled,  
 Dupe of to-morrow, even from a child.  
 Thus, many a sad to-morrow came and went,  
 Till, all my stock of infant sorrows spent,  
 I learn'd at last submission to my lot,  
 But, though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot."

It did not please Heaven to unweave the tangled meshes of poor Cowper's brain. The dark delusion of despair hung over his mind to the very verge of his long life of just threescore years and ten. His last original piece, the "Castaway," is, indeed, under all the circumstances, one of the most affecting ever composed. He had been reading, in Anson's Voyages, an account of a man lost overboard in a gale of wind: that appalling casualty, which often consigns the sailor to a helpless fate, is told in vivid stanzas, closing with the saddest possible moralizing:—

"No poet wept him; but the page  
 Of narrative sincere,  
 That tells his name, his worth, his age,  
 Is wet with Auson's tear:  
 And tears by bards or heroes shed  
 Alike immortalize the dead.

"I therefore purpose not, or dream,  
 Descanting on his fate,  
 To give the melancholy theme  
 A more enduring date:  
 But misery still delights to trace  
 Its semblance in another's case.

"No voice divine the storm allay'd,  
 No light propitious shone,

When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,  
 We perish'd, each alone,—  
 But I beneath a rougher sea  
 And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he."

On his death-bed Cowper put away the words of consolation and hope that were addressed to him, thus showing, in the words of a friend who tended his last moments, that, though his spirit was on the eve of being invested with angelic light, the darkness of delusion still veiled it. As if to mitigate the anguish of those kind hearts which had watched so dark a death-bed, the expression into which his countenance settled after death was that of calmness and composure mingled, as it were, with holy surprise.

For these very imperfect notices of Cowper, falling so very far below the interest of the subject and my own wishes, let me make some amends by repeating to you some admirable stanzas, entitled "Cowper's Grave." They are from a living woman's pen:—

COWPER'S GRAVE.

It is a place where poets crown'd may feel the heart's decaying ;  
 It is a place where happy saints may weep amid their praying :  
 Yet let the grief and humbleness as low as silence languish !  
 Earth surely now may give her calm to whom she gave her anguish.

O poets ! from a maniac's tongue was pour'd the deathless singing !  
 O Christian ! at your cross of hope a hopeless hand was clinging !  
 O men ! this man, in brotherhood, your weary paths beguiling,  
 Groan'd inly while he taught you peace, and died while ye were smiling.

And now, what time ye all may read through dimming tears his story,  
 How discord on the music fell, and darkness on the glory,  
 And how, when, one by one, sweet sounds and wandering lights departed,  
 He wore no less a loving face because so broken-hearted,—

He shall be strong to sanctify the poet's high vocation,  
 And bow the meekest Christian down in meeker adoration ;  
 Nor ever shall he be, in praise, by wise or good forsaken ;  
 Named softly, as the household name of one whom God hath taken.

With quiet sadness, and no gloom, I learn to think upon him  
 With meekness, that is gratefulness to God whose heaven hath won him,  
 Who suffer'd once the madness-cloud to his own love to blind him,  
 But gently led the blind along where breath and bird could find him,

And wrought within his shatter'd brain such quick poetic senses  
 As hills have language for, and stars, harmonious influences ;  
 The pulse of dew upon the grass kept his within its number,  
 And silent shadows from the trees refresh'd him like a slumber.

Wild timid hares were drawn from woods to share his home-caresses,  
 Uplooking to his human eyes with sylvan tendernesses ;  
 The very world, by God's constraint, from falsehood's ways removing,  
 Its women and its men became, beside him, true and loving.

But while in blindness he remain'd unconscious of the guiding,  
 And things provided came without the sweet sense of providing,  
 He testified this solemn truth, though frenzy-desolated :—  
 Nor man nor nature satisfy whom only God created !

Like a sick child that knoweth not his mother while she blesses,  
 And drops upon his burning brow the coolness of her kisses,  
 That turns his fever'd eyes around,—“ My mother ! where's my mother ? ”  
 As if such tender words and looks could come from any other !

The fever gone, with leaps of heart, he sees her bending o'er him,  
 Her face all pale from watchful love, the unwearied love she bore him !  
 Thus woke the poet from the dream his life's long fever gave him,  
 Beneath those deep pathetic eyes which closed in death to save him.

Thus ? Oh, not *thus* ! No type of earth could image that awaking,  
 Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of seraphs round him breaking,  
 Or felt the new immortal throb of soul from body parted,  
 But felt *those eyes alone*, and knew “ *My Saviour* ” not deserted !

Deserted ! Who hath dreamt that, when the cross in darkness rested  
 Upon the Victim's hidden face, no love was manifested ?  
 What frantic hands outstretch'd have e'er the atoning drops averted ?  
 What tears have wash'd them from the soul, that *one* should be deserted ?

Deserted ! God could separate from his own essence rather,  
 And Adam's sins *have* swept between the righteous Son and Father ;  
 Yea, once Immanuel's orphan'd cry his universe hath shaken ;  
 It went up single, echoless :—“ My God, I am forsaken ! ”

It went up from the Holy's lips amid his lost creation,  
 That of the lost no son should use those words of desolation ;  
 That earth's worst frenzies, marring hope, should mar not hope's fruition,  
 And I, on Cowper's grave, should see his rapture in a vision !

## LECTURE X.

BURNS.

(WITH NOTICES OF JOHNSON'S LIVES OF THE POETS.)

MONOTONY OF POPE'S VERSE—THE REVIVAL OF A TRUER SPIRIT OF POETRY—CHATTERTON—MERIT OF COWPER—DR. JOHNSON'S LITERARY DICTATORSHIP—HIS "LIVES OF THE POETS"—SIR EGERTON BRYDGES'S CRITICISM ON THEM—COWPER'S JUDGMENT OF THEM—JOHNSON'S INCAPACITY FOR POETICAL CRITICISM—JOHNSON'S JUDGMENTS ON GRAY—"LONDON"—"VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES"—PERCY'S "RELIQUES OF ANCIENT ENGLISH POETRY"—THE CHARACTER OF THIS POETRY—ROBERT BURNS—HIS BOYHOOD—EARLY TRIALS—MOSSGELL FARM—THE FRESHNESS OF HIS POETRY—ITS UNIVERSALITY—WORDSWORTH'S LINES—THE MOUNTAIN-DAISY—THE FIELD-MOUSE—COTTER'S SATURDAY NIGHT—TAM O'SHANTER—MARY CAMPBELL—MORALITY OF BURNS'S POETRY—THE BARD'S EPITAPH—WORDSWORTH'S LINES TO THE SONS OF BURNS.

IN my last lecture I was constrained to pass, somewhat too hastily, from the poetry of Pope to that of Cowper, thus bringing the earlier portion of the eighteenth century in too close contact with its later period. It has been my aim throughout this course of lectures, to make it, as far as possible, comprehensive not only of the exposition of the individual poets selected, but of the progress of English poetry in its successive ages, as it has been modified by the influence of genius and the spirit of the times. I propose, therefore, in order not to deviate now from the plan as presented to my own mind at the outset, to endeavour to supply, in a very general way, the chasm in my last lecture between Pope and Cowper. Before proceeding to the chief subject of the present lecture, I wish to dispose in as short a space of some of the omitted subjects. The influence of Pope's poetry, or rather that school of poetry which began with Dryden and was completed by Pope, was unquestionably injurious on all the writers who came within its reach. It reduced poetry to mere versification, and thus, in the hands of pupils who were deficient in the natural powers of the masters, it became mechanical,—a thing of sound, and little else. Besides, the ear was habituated but to one fashion of sound; for Dryden and Pope had spent almost their whole effort upon one form of verse,—the rhyming couplet of the ten-syllable line. They had set English poetry to one tune in the position of its pauses and the balanced succession of the notes, so that



every puny versifier could give, if not the same music, at least a very good echo of it. It became a kind of hand-organ operation, in which one hand could grind out the sounds nigh as well as another. Besides this levelling faculty, listening almost exclusively to one fashion of metrical sounds, the ear lost its power of receiving other metres. With the incessant, unrelieved tinkling of the heroic rhyming couplet, the sense of poetical music grew deaf to the richer and varied harmonies in which the elder poets had taken such delight, and exhibited such manifold power both in the language and in themselves. The melody of Shakespeare's admirable dramatic blank verse, and the equally appropriate epic blank verse, and the variety of versifications in his smaller poems, ceased to be appreciated; and, when Pope is extolled as having brought verse to perfection, it is forgotten that there is a multitude of other metrical constructions besides that on which he relied. Indeed, when he departed from the one tune he played so sweetly, in other measures he failed egregiously; for, when attempting an unwonted lyrical strain in honour of St. Cecilia, to whom certainly his best music was due, the strain he uttered was one from which the saint herself could scarce have extracted melody; and in that much overrated ode, "The Dying Christian to his Soul," the sound of the verses is at once poor and inappropriate, falling greatly below the solemnity of the subject. But the imitators of Pope risked few such experiments, and followed their model in that species of verse in which he had been so successful, that they were willing to consider it the chief and best of English measure, if not the only one worth cultivating. Prosperous as both Dryden and Pope had been in establishing each in his day, and though there have been critics who have praised that species of poetry as the highest order of poetry, it is a school in which not one poet of eminence has risen. In fact, it died with Pope; for, when carried to its legitimate results, it then became obvious how much nature had been sacrificed to art, and how, sooner or later, the heart of the nation craved that nature should be brought home to enjoy her own again. The truth was told in some lines by Dryden:—

" There is music, uninform'd by art,  
In those wild notes which, with a merry heart,  
The birds in unfrequented shades express,  
Who, better taught at home, yet please us less."

Giving to Pope all praise for skill as a versifier in one form of verse, I cannot but consider his metrical powers as greatly overrated, when I remember how limited they were in their application. Indeed, it seems to me conclusive of the sinking of English poetry during that period,

that its music was monotonous. The Muse had given up many of her grandest and sweetest notes. Artificial poetical composition needs but a limited set of metres, like a musical instrument with its certain range of keys. But true poetry has its hundred, its unnumbered voices, like nature. The poet needs them all: each one in its true time is ready in his service. How narrow must the scope of poetry have grown when, as with the poets and critics of a considerable part of the eighteenth century, the high-wrought, one-toned verse of Pope attained such exaggerated and exclusive favour! It has not been so with the greatest of our poets; and it is indeed one proof of their greatness that there were perpetually rising, in their spirits, imaginations and thoughts and passions, each naturally seeking and finding utterance in varied and appropriate measure. When calling quickly to my memory the vast variety of English metres, the compass of instrumental music seems an inadequate parallel to the many-toned voice of Poetry. I would find it rather in the multitudinous sounds of Nature herself:—

“ For terror, joy, or pity,  
 Vast is the compass and the swell of notes ;  
 From the babe's first cry, to voice of regal city,  
 Rolling a solemn sea-like bass, that floats  
 Far as the woodlands, with the trill to blend  
 Of that shy songstress whose love-tale  
 Might tempt an angel to descend  
 While hovering o'er the moonlight vale ;  
 \*            \*            \*            \*            \*  
 The heavens, whose aspect makes our minds as still  
 As they themselves appear to be,  
 Innumerable voices fill  
 With everlasting harmony ;  
 The towering headlands, crown'd with mist,  
 Their feet among the billows, know  
 That Ocean is a mighty harmonist ;  
 Thy pinions, universal air,  
 Ever waving to and fro,  
 Are delegates of harmony, and bear  
 Strains that support the seasons in their round :  
 Stern winter loves a dirge-like sound.”

Turn to the pages of Pope or of his imitators: the sound comes like the melody from a well-tuned and well-touched musical instrument; but when you listen, with an ear well cultivated by the study of the metrical combination and flow of words, to the measured music that may be heard, either sensibly or imaginatively, from the pages of the greater poets, the sound comes with the touching and ever-varied har-

mony of nature,—at one time with the loud voice of the stormy wind, again with the soothing murmur of a breeze blowing through the tops of pine-trees; at one time with surges like ocean angry and enchafed, again like the ripples of a lake or river touching the sides of an anchored ship, or the gentle sounds of a running brook.

I notice this subject of versification because the merits of Pope in this department have been, I think, exaggerated in a manner injurious to English poetry, as superseding its noblest and most varied metres. A style of versification was introduced which fascinated the ear, because the tune, though soon monotonous, was not only smooth but marked. If the ear once content itself with this form, it is apt to neglect that cultivation which is essential for the enjoyment of the finest poetical melody in the language. It was a sign of the coming regeneration of English poetry when some appeared who sought other forms of verse than that one which Pope had bequeathed to his imitators. Simultaneous with this was a returning sense of what was due to nature,—an evident desire to quit the path which had been so artificially cut and beaten. Pope's immediate followers had pushed the system to its limits; and readers began at last to ask themselves whether something else was not wanted besides polished language, verse of an unrelieved smoothness, and a certain perpetually-recurring assortment of images, which had become so much the traditional property of the versifiers that a writer could set himself in the business, as any tradesman might supply himself with his stock in trade. People were growing weary of hearing nothing but cold mythological personifications. They scarcely ventured to say so; but, for all that, it was a relief to hear the sun called by his simple almanac-name instead of the loftier prescriptive title of Phœbus. The moon had been known only as Diana. Naiads were as plenty in every watercourse as fish. Dryads were as common as birds; and every west wind that blew, whether it was "the sweet south or the blustering north-wester, was a gentle zephyr." The versifiers who took Pope for their model were like the artists who illustrated his poems by carrying the system out to all its consequences. In one of the early editions of his poems there is an engraving prefixed to the "Essay on Criticism," representing some venerable ancient introducing Pope, the little Queen Anne's poet, wrapped in a Roman toga, to the nine Muses, who are seated by the side of a kind of creek, clad in the usual amount of clothing deemed appropriate to the comfort of a Muse,—one of them with a foot in the water and looking up to the sky, and another seated on a small eminence and busy performing on the bass-viol. This was the taste of the times: poetry had set the fashion, and the arts followed in the train.

If Pope was followed by servile imitators, there also came after him poets who, with a truer fervour of inspiration, sought to unfetter the poetry of their country from the technicalities and the artifices which had been woven round it. They were obliged to toil against the influence of established authority and a dominant false taste. Thomson, and Gray, and Goldsmith, and Beattie, and Churchill, and Collins, contributed to the revival of a truer spirit of poetry, and have left behind them poems which it is much easier for me to find space for in my good opinion than in my lectures. There was Chatterton, too truly

“The marvellous boy,  
The sleepless soul that perish'd in his pride.”

Hereditary insanity and the frenzy of a frustrated ambition tortured his young heart; and, after having baffled half the learning of Britain by his impostures, he ended his brief agony of life by poison.

The poets of the eighteenth century, especially its latter portion, deserved much for ridding English poetry of its cold formalities and pouring fresh life-blood into it. Especially was this the merit of him whom in the last lecture I presented to you in such a hurried, crowded comment,—the happy, unhappy—the cheerful, melancholy—Cowper.

These poets not only threw off the depressing weight of an artificial taste still remaining from the Anglo-Gallican school of poetry, but there was an adverse authority, in the literary dictatorship of Dr. Johnson. This authority was exerted not only to the full extent of his colloquial influence, but made still more absolute and more lasting in a work to which I have alluded once or twice in the course of these lectures, and on which I must now dwell for a few minutes.

Let me preface what I have to say either directly or in illustration of Dr. Johnson with the remark that it applies to him solely as a critic of poetry. As the maker of the great Dictionary of our language, he is entitled to the most reverential gratitude of every student of English literature. He has written much excellent morality, and as a man he was kind in deeds while harsh in words. When the late Bishop White, visiting England in early life, was introduced to him, Dr. Johnson said to him, in allusion to the then recent Stamp Act difficulties, “Sir, if I had been prime minister I would have sent a frigate and levelled one of your principal cities.” “But,” added the bishop, in recording this remark, with the admirable discrimination of a gentle-hearted man, “I heard from him sentiments convincing me he would not have done as he said.” The present examination has reference, however, to Dr. Johnson’s words, his critical judgments. I have no ambition to stretch myself to the tiptoe height of my small stature to strike a blow at a lofty



name. The reputation of Dr. Johnson, and the want of a better work on the subject, has given to his "Lives of the Poets" a circulation which has beyond all question been injurious to the cause of our imaginative literature. It was a luckless day for the poets when they fell into the hands of Samuel Johnson. This work, which it is absolutely necessary for me to notice, because it is the very book which is always resorted to as authority in the history and criticism of English poetry,—this work has an absurdity in the capital letters of its title-page:—"The Lives of the most Eminent English Poets;" and when we open it, to our astonishment, as has been well said, the first name we find is that of Cowley. What has become of the morning star of English poetry? where is the bright Elizabethan constellation? Or, if names be more acceptable than images, where is the ever-to-be-honoured Chaucer? Where is Spenser? Where Sydney? And, lastly, where is Shakspeare? These, and a multitude of others, not unworthy to be placed near them, their contemporaries and successors, we have *not*. But in their stead we have Roscommon, Stepney, and Phillips, and Walsh, and Smith, and Duke, and King, and Sprat, Halifax, Granville, Sheffield, Congreve, Broome, and other, reputed magnates, metrical writers utterly worthless and useless, except as instances to show what a small quantity of brains is necessary to procure a considerable stock of admiration, provided the aspirant will accommodate himself to the likings and fashions of the day. The truth is, that, amidst all the small deer that were herded together by Johnson as the most eminent English poets, Milton is the one solitary poet of high eminence. But the wrong does not stop here. Passing by the consideration that Johnson's registry excludes all but one of the greatest names, and includes all the little ones, or, at the least, abundance of them, the execution of the work is as wrong as the plan. It is full of false canons of criticism,—false, I do not hesitate to say as absolutely as Dr. Johnson could make an assertion,—false because at variance with the unimpeachable authority of the actual poetic inspirations of the great poets. Its incurable defect is an utter absence of imagination: it is a treatise on imaginative literature produced by an unimaginative intellect. Yet it acquired in its day an authority which none dared publicly to question, though there were minds well endowed with the elements of true poetic character which deeply felt what injury was done to the cause. That ardent enthusiast, full of the fervour of genius, Sir Egerton Brydges, who died only a few years ago, has recorded the impression the work made on his mind at the time of its publication. "The appearance of Johnson's Lives," are his words, "damped my spirits and froze the genial flowings of my soul: their



captiousness, their hardness, their awkward humour, their affected railery, and capricious contempt, seemed like the burst of discordant sounds upon fairy dreams. If the splendour of Collins could not save him from such rudenesses, what, I thought, must inferior powers expect?" Another witness to a similar feeling, expressed, not after the lapse of years, but promptly, at the time, was Cowper. He revolted especially at Johnson's treatment of Milton, and expresses a meek man's warmest indignation at the critic's injustice. It is in one of the letters in that inimitable epistolary collection, the most natural and agreeable in our literature,—Cowper's Letters,—that he writes in these words, after noticing how he has smeared his canvas in the portraiture of Milton as a man:—"As a poet, Johnson has treated Milton with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse's wings and trampled them under his great foot. I am convinced he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever anything so delightful as the music of 'Paradise Lost'? It is like that of a fine organ, has the fullest and the deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of a Dorian flute,—variety without end, and never equalled. Yet the doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation. Oh, I could thrash his old jacket till I made his pension jingle in his pocket!" To this playful vengeance of the gentle Cowper, let me add the belief that Johnson's eulogy of the "Paradise Lost" bears the marks of having been extorted from him, chiefly, I presume, out of deference to Addison's celebrated critical papers on that poem in "The Spectator." He had no sympathy with the highest poetic genius that was contemporary with him. The fine powers of Gray, the elaborate finish of whose poetry, it might be thought, would have pleased him, were disparaged in a style disreputable to a candid critic. The high, aspiring imagination of the unfortunate Collins won no better treatment; and this is lamentable to think of, when we remember how his tender nature suffered for the want of sympathy, the fever of his visionary tremulous spirit turned in the anguish of disappointment to insanity, and his fitful career, closing in the succession of a moody melaucholy, a few lucid intervals, and paroxysms of a maniac's violence, when his shrieks were heard in the most appalling manner echoing through the cloisters of Winchester Cathedral.

In all that was wrought by the pen of Dr. Johnson, or all that rolled from his tongue, there is no evidence of his having any apprehension of

a high effort of a pure imagination, whether of the earlier great poets or his contemporaries. When he assumed the office of the great critic of English poetry, he ventured on a duty for which he was physically, intellectually, and morally unfit. Physically, because his shortsightedness amounted to a species of blindness, obliging him to hold communion with the visible world through the secondary medium of books. If I remember rightly, he was hard of hearing; he certainly was stone-deaf to the finest metres of English verse,—that sweet music which rises up to the imagination when reading poetry to our silent selves, catching the flow of the verse and beautiful sounds, though in silence as still as a midnight thought. Unless poetry beat stoutly and rattled loudly on the drum of Dr. Johnson's ear, he proclaimed there was no melody in it, as he said of blank verse (spirits of Shakspeare and Milton, what a thought!) that it was verse only to the eye. How far Dr. Johnson's education influenced his character it is not necessary to ask; but there was one of his teachers whose influence may have had some connection with the Johnsonian grandiloquence: this was a man that published a spelling-book and dedicated it to the Universe. Intellectually Dr. Johnson was disqualified for the guardianship of the memory of the poets, because, whatever were his powers of argumentation, no particle of imagination or fancy entered into his constitution. He was perpetually striving to disenchant poetry of all its magic, to strip it of the radiant vestments of its imaginative philosophy, "sky-robcs spun out of Iris woof," and wrap it in the coarse, home-spun cloak of his logic. Morally, Johnson was unfit for the lofty task, without, of course, meaning to impeach the uprightness of his character or his piety. It has been said, with great truth, that, as the poet must write in the spirit of self-sacrifice, so the reader of poetry who would rightly feel and enjoy it must in like manner pass out of himself into it. He must forget himself and his own prejudices and predilections and associations, and give himself up to the work he is reading, and try to take his stand on the author's point of view. So that the obstacle which checks the spread of true, genial poetry—of such poetry as carries us out of the purlieus of our own habitual notions into fresh fields of the imagination—is still the spirit of selfishness,—man's unwillingness to abandon his old inveterate preconceptions. Now, taking this principle,—the truth of which must be felt by all,—can there be a moment's hesitation as to Johnson's moral unfitness for poetical criticism? If the principle hold good as to the reader of poetry, how much more as to him who sets himself up for a judge to guide and even command the reading of others! To forget himself and his own prejudices and predilections and associ-

ations, to take his stand on the author's point of view, were impossibilities for a nature constituted like Johnson's. It dwelt in the impenetrable centre of his own habitual notions,—in the thick fog of literary bigotry,—taking his stand in himself as the central point, and therefore, for the most part, beholding things in wrong proportions and in false lights. His poetic sympathies were few and contracted; and, instead of that catholic taste which is at once the true critic's power and his exceeding great reward, he was bitter and bigoted in his judgments and rugged in his feelings. What is the entire warp and woof of Boswell's curious biography of him but a tissue of unbroken dogmatism? Perhaps there never was a virtuous man with so much of selfishness. His appetite for argument was as voracious as his physical appetite. I will not say it was meat and drink to him, because his dogmatism was intermitted, and then only, in the act of eating. Argumentative triumph was his ambition, his passion; and it would be edifying to observe into how many opinions, strange for a wise and good man, he was led by this overweening self-love, the adoration of his own opinions and tastes. It made him often the advocate even of shallow judgments magnified and mystified by swelling words, and sometimes of dangerous opinions; for instance, his absolute doctrine in these words:—"Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical," because, among other sophistical reasons, "the essence of poetry is invention;—such invention as, by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights. The topics of devotion are few." Contemplative piety cannot be poetical! the topics of devotion are few! Why, what in the world had become of the good man's Bible? Mark how Johnson's perpetual intrusion of his own personality, in some shape or other, made him censorious and scornful,—qualities fatal to all genial love of poetry. By it, and the added incense of flattery which his satellites were for ever burning beneath his nostrils, the idea of self became an absorbing one. Look at the account of him in social life, seizing upon almost any opinion for the sake of opposition and disputation, with a dangerous recklessness of truth, as if it was a thing that could be safely so tampered with; insulting Garrick, ridiculing poor Goldsmith, treading upon Boswell as if he were, in rough sport, rubbing his huge foot upon a spaniel's back, and then, after monopolizing nearly all the talk to himself, with an inimitable self-complacency exclaiming, "What a fine conversation we have had!"—an exclamation which, considering the monstrous disproportion, was about as appropriate as if, on turning down the last leaf of

one of the longest of these lectures, I were to say to you, "What a fine conversation we have had!"

Now, if an admirer of Dr. Johnson should be disposed to think that I have thrown off the bridle of my tongue, let it be remembered what authority his work on the poets has exercised. Let it be borne in mind how he has scattered his harsh and scornful judgments, pronouncing Milton's exquisite "Masque of Comus" a drama inelegantly splendid and tediously instructive; his sonnets, "the best only not bad;" "Lycidas," "vulgar and disgusting;" and undoing his reluctant eulogy of the "Paradise Lost" by declaring its perusal a duty rather than a pleasure, and that we retire harassed and overburdened, besides condemning its diction as harsh and barbarous, and waging perpetual war against what has been well styled eminently the English metre: how he could find in Milton's republicanism nothing but a selfish lawlessness; and how, after the lapse of more than a hundred years, he could venture to say of such a man as Milton, that, omitting public prayer, he omitted all. Let it be remembered, too, that the arch-critic could discover in Gray's fine odes nothing more than what he superciliously calls "a kind of strutting dignity,—a glittering accumulation of ungraceful ornaments, image magnified by affectation, and language laboured into harshness;" and that he dismissed the true poetry of the hapless Collins with the contemptuous opinion that it may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure. These were judgments, too, coming from one who claimed to be himself a poet, esteeming the high-sounding declamation of his "London" and "Vanity of Human Wishes" as poetry, and priding himself upon his hundred lines a day. For all the wrong—unconscious wrong and wilful wrong—that Johnson has done the poets I might take a malicious vengeance in a retaliative censoriousness on some of his own poems. Indeed, I had written something of the sort; but some admirer of Johnson's might say that is ill-natured and has nothing to do with the matter. I think myself it would have something to do with it: but let it pass.

About the same time the "Lives of the Poets" was published, another work was also given to the world, which, though at first coldly received, and by Johnson treated with contempt, was destined to render good service to the cause of English literature. Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry" has been esteemed by high authorities as one of the chief agencies in reviving a genuine feeling for true poetry in the public mind. The traditionary minstrelsy, ancient ballads, and historical songs were collected, restored, and remodelled, and thus redeemed from



their obscurity. It was a poetry which, to its own early generation, had ministered to an important public use by softening, and perhaps chastening, the rudeness of a martial and unlettered people. It was now to serve a widely-different purpose:—to help in restoring nature where it had been displaced by artifice, to give life again to what had grown cold, and to invigorate a poetry which was sickly from excessive refinement.

But this poetry, which Dr. Percy brought in his collection to the acquaintance of scholars and men of reading, had a life elsewhere. It was composed of winged words that had taken their flight from one generation to another. Its home was not so much in books as in floating tradition preserved by affectionate memory. It was a music in the air; for it might be heard sung by reapers in the field one harvest after another, by women lightening with its oft-repeated strains their household labours, by mothers singing over their children, or in some single chanting to a fireside group. It was a poetry dwelling chiefly in the North of Britain, secluded from Southern refinements. There was, for instance, a Scottish gardener's wife, who had an inexhaustible store of the ballads; some simple, solemn ditties, which when she chanted them could bring tears down an old man's cheeks, and others spirit-stirring, at sound of which the fire flashed in the dark eyes of her listening child. That deep dark-eyed Scottish bairn was Robert Burns. His ear was attuned in childhood to the old minstrelsy; the sounds sunk into his spirit to come forth again in after-years, his imagination giving them a more glorious poetry than they had ever echoed to before. The obligation of the poet to his other parent was careful religious instruction, which, if it did not furnish safeguards against sad excesses of his impetuous passions in after-life, at least saved him from ever sinking into the recklessness of a reprobate. He has recorded also a debt of his infant and boyish days to an old woman domesticated under the same humble roof, remarkable, he says, for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition, and having the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantrips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. "The household life of Burns's parents is represented in the imperishable portraiture of the 'Cotter's Saturday Night;' and the origin of those stanzas finely exhibits the continued presence of early salutary influences amid the tumultuous passions of the poet's heart." There was, he said, something peculiarly venerable to his thoughts in the phrase "Let us worship God," used by a decent, sober head of a family introducing family wor-



ship. That single simple sentiment, thus impressed in early life, was the germ which was expanded by his true poetic imagination into the admirable description above alluded to.

The adversity that befell the elder Burns weighed heavily on the poet's boyhood. In consequence of the father's misfortune, there fell to the share of the boys more labour than was good for them,—the premature pressure which is too apt to force the young heart out of its true proportions. A good plain education led Burns to a course of reading which might shame many a one with better opportunities. But the poetic instinct in him was awakened, I imagine, less by what he saw on the pages of books than by the traditionary minstrelsy by which he was led along as by the music sung, up in the air, by the invisible Ariel. The earliest stirrings of his powers were rude rhymes half uttered when he was humming the tune, or, in Scottish phrase, crooning to himself, as he has described in one of the familiar poetical epistles he was fond of writing to his friends :—

“ Amaist as soon as I could spell,  
I to the crambo-jingle fell,  
Tho' rude an' rough ;  
Yet crooning to a body's sell  
Does weel enough.”

The poetic fire was kindled by another fire ; for the first of the long series of his love-stories dates in his fifteenth year, when the boy sought expression in verse for his devotion to his bonny partner in the harvest-field, where it was a Scottish custom to group the reapers in pairs, lad and lass. With one whose heart was like tinder, it was impulse enough to give speech to his imagination. The early trials of his strength were very speedily followed by the ambition of gaining for himself a name, and even more ; and this shows how soon the consciousness of his might came to him,—the ambition of producing something to do honour to his country, his slighted country :—

“ I mind it weel, in early date,  
When I was beardless, young, and blate,  
And first could thresh the barn,  
Or haud a yokin' at the pleugh,  
An' though forfoughten sair enough,  
Yet unco proud to learn !  
When first amang the yellow corn  
A man I reckon'd was,  
An' wi' the lave ilk merry morn  
Could rank my rig and lass.

"E'en then a wish (I mind its power),  
 A wish that to my latest hour  
 Shall strongly heave my breast,—  
 That I for poor auld Scotland's sake  
 Some usefu' plan or book could make,  
 Or sing a sang at least.  
 The rough burr-thistle, spreading wide  
 Among the bearded bear,  
 I turn'd the weedin'-heuk aside,  
 An' spared the symbol dear."

Burns's first notoriety—his first becoming known, as he said, as a maker of rhymes—came in a way scarcely to have been expected, and less congenial with the spirit of true poetry than the simple effusions of his better feelings. The Church of Scotland was divided into two ecclesiastical parties, who were waging against each other a warfare of words the bitterness of which spread from the manse to the cottage; and, as Burns said, polemical divinity was putting the country half mad. In the midst of a general strife he was not one likely to remain unconcerned. How far he felt a real interest in the discussions of "Auld Light" and "New Light" it would be hard to say; but, be that as it may, it was a chance for him to feed his hungering after a name. He began his impetuous alliance in some of his free-spoken and irreverent productions, which were welcomed, as he described it, with a roar of applause. This was a welcome given—such was the heat of ecclesiastical factions—not only by laity, but by clergy, on the side the poet espoused. These audacious pieces wrought this effect to be noticed in tracing the progress of Burns's genius:—that they developed, and doubtless at the time increased, the nerve and force of his imaginative powers. The influence on the moral side of his genius was much more questionable. The excesses which Burns witnessed among men active in the national church of Scotland exaggerated his hatred of hypocrisy, and, at the same time, a recklessness of public opinion, a palliation of his own misdoings in the belief that the propriety was an assumed and superficial thing, as in the address to the "Unco Guid," or rigidly righteous:—

"O ye wha are sae guid yoursel,  
 Sae pious and sae holy,  
 Ye've nought to do but mark and tell  
 Your neebors' faults and folly!  
 Whose life is like a weel-gaun mill,  
 Supplied wi' store o' water,  
 The heaped happer's ebbing still,  
 And still the clap plays clatter."

Or in that better-known stanza,—

“ Oh wad some power the giftie gie us  
 To see oursels as others see us!  
 It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
 And foolish notion;  
 What airs in dress an’ gait wad lea’e us  
 And e’en devotion ! ”

Burns had an ambition to distinguish himself by his conversational powers,—oratory to groups of villagers: this made him a ready disputant in the polemics of the church. That soon passed; but he found another kind of intercourse,—unhappily, a live-long intercourse, with boon companions,—a freer field for his native wit.

“ The star that rules my luckless lot  
 Has fated me the russet coat  
 And damn’d my fortune to the groat,  
 But, in requit,  
 Has bless’d me wi’ a random shot  
 O’ country wit ! ”

Occasional intervals of absence from the homestead had early made Burns a looker-on in scenes of freer living than was known in the domains of peasant-life. The fondness for revelry had not yet begun to work its mischief upon him; and, while free from the sting of self-reproach and the misery of a dangerous indulgence, he was able to rouse the feeling of nationality on the subject of Scotch drink, and to give a poetic dignity to distilled liquors. The spirit of Pindar’s first Olympic ode—the praise of water and the panegyric on the Sicilian ring—breathes in Burns’s stanzas, giving as they do a dignity, a sublimity, to strong drink, by a grand effort of imagination in associating it with the dying Highland soldier:—

“ Bring a Scotsman frae his hill,  
 Clap in his cheek a highland gill,  
 Say such is Royal George’s will,  
 And there’s the foe!  
 He has nae thought but how to kill  
 Twa at a blow.

“ Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him.  
 Death comes; wi’ fearless eye he sees him,  
 Wi’ bluidy hand a welcome gies him;  
 And, When he fa’s,  
 His latest draught o’ breathing lea’es him  
 In faint huzzas.

"Sages their solemn e'en may steek,  
 An' raise a philosophic reck,  
 An' physically causes seek,  
     In clime and season.  
 But tell me Whisky's name in Greek,  
     I'll tell the reason."

It seems to have been reserved for Burns, in one of the genial moods of the better part of his life, to give a picture, at once humorous and elevated, of tipsyness:—

"The clachan yill had made me canty,  
     I was na fou, but just had plenty;  
 I stacher'd whyles, but yet took tent aye  
     To free the ditches;  
 An' hillocks, stanes, and bushes kenn'd aye  
     Frae ghaists and witches.

"The rising moon began to glower  
     The distant Cumnock hills out'owre;  
 To count her horns wi' a' my pow'r,  
     I set mysel;  
 But whether she had three or four,  
     I could na tell."

The most propitious era of the poet's life was that portion of it spent at the Mossgeil Farm. The cottage, with its few acres, had been taken by the two brothers, with the dutiful and affectionate purpose of providing a shelter for their parents and the determination of earning their subsistence by manly labour. It was there made manifest that Scotland was in possession of a great national poet. The early inspirations of the Scottish Muse had been given to the indwellers of a palace,—the ancient King James Stuart; and, after poetry had declined with the decline of the national spirit, in consequence of the union of the two kingdoms of England and Scotland, after the lapse of centuries it was reanimated in the humble clay cottage of Mossgeil Farm. The poet's life was the outdoor-life of a labourer in the fields; he was in perpetual and quickly-sensitive communion with nature; and here especially was gained the glory of the peasant-poet of Scotland. The poetry of Burns was as indigenous as the thistle; it was a pure native growth, as different as possible from the trim, unnatural exotics which had been cultivated with hothouse temperature and method. The freshness of old Chaucer's genius seemed to be breathing again upon British poetry. The long-lost honours given by the chief of the early poets to the lowliest flower of the field, as I noticed in a former lecture, was now restored, when Burns suddenly checked his plough at the sight of the mountain-daisy looking

up to him from the mid-furrows. It was a moment of genuine poetic inspiration ; for, while actually holding the plough, his imagination fashioned itself into musical words :—

“ Wee, modest, crimson-tippéd flower,  
Thou ’s met me in an evil hour ;  
For I maun crush amang the stoure  
Thy slender stem ;  
To spare thee now is past my power,  
Thou bonnie gem.

“ Alas ! it ’s no’ thy neebor sweet,  
The bonnie Lark, companion meet,  
Bending thee ’mang the dewy weet,  
Wi’ speckled breast,  
When upward-springing, blithe, to greet  
The purpling East.

“ Cauld blew the bitter-biting North  
Upon thy early, humble birth ;  
Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth  
Amid the storm,  
Scarce rear’d above the parent-earth  
Thy tender form.

“ The flaunting flowers our gardens yield,  
High sheltering woods and wa’s maun shield ;  
But thou, beneath the random bield  
O’ clod or stane,  
Adorns the histie stibble-field,  
Unseen, alane.

“ There, in thy scanty mantle clad,  
Thy snawie bosom sunward spread,  
Thou lifts thy unassuming head  
In humble guise ;  
But now the share up-tears thy bed,  
And low thou lies !

“ Such is the fate of artless maid,  
Sweet floweret of the rural shade !  
By love’s simplicity betray’d,  
And guileless trust,  
Till she, like thee, all soil’d, is laid  
Low i’ the dust.

“ Such is the fate of simple bard,  
On life’s rough ocean luckless starr’d :  
Unskilful he to note the card  
Of prudent lore,  
Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,  
And whelm him o’er.



“Such fate to suffering worth is given,  
 Who long with wants and woes has striven,  
 By human pride or cunning driven  
     To misery’s brink,  
 Till, wrench’d of every stay but Heaven,  
     He, ruin’d, sink !

“Even thou who mourn’st the Daisy’s fate,  
 That fate is thine,—no distant date ;  
 Stern Ruin’s ploughshare drives elate,  
     Full on thy bloom,  
 Till crush’d beneath the furrow’s weight  
     Shall be thy doom !”

Who can fail to feel that this was

“Indeed a genuine birth,  
 Of poetry :—a bursting forth  
 Of genius from the dust ?”

What a strain of truth and imagination, manly and tender-hearted ! Compare Burns with Pope in descriptive poetry,—comparison in other departments would be ill-judged,—the grotto at Twickenham with the bleak Mossgeil mountain-side ; and how redolent of nature is this little poem ! It has the freshness and grateful odour that arises from the new furrows of a ploughed field. In that singular collection, the “Medical Remains of the great Lord Bacon,” one of the fanciful prescriptions for the prolongation of life and the renewing of health was, in an early hour, after the sun is risen, to take an air from some high and open place with a ventilation of roses and fresh violets, and to stir the earth with infusion of wine and mint. Poetry in the eighteenth century seemed to need some such renovation ; and, after her long confinement in the close air of an artificial system, the peasant-poet of Scotland ministered to her health. When Burns, in the rapt mood of inspiration, was standing with his hand on the plough, how little could he have dreamed that the music thus rising in his heart would wing its flight as far as the English language,—the spirit of every true Scotsman, whether in the centre of British India or at the farthest west of the wilds of America, kindling at the recollection of that one mountain-daisy ! The criticism which more than any other delights me is that which may sometimes, though rarely, be discovered in the response made by the imagination of one poet to that of another. Some seven or eight years ago a great poet was travelling through that region of country which has earned even the title of *The Land of Burns*, and one of those itinerary records which the imagination of Wordsworth has scattered in every land he has visited is in these lines :—

“ ‘There!’ said a stripling, pointing with meet pride  
 Towards a low roof, with green trees half conceal’d,  
 ‘Is Mossgeil Farm, and that’s the very field  
 Where Burns plough’d up the daisy.’ Far and wide  
 A plain below stretch’d seaward; while, descried  
 Above sea-clouds, the Peaks of Arran rose,  
 And, by that simple notice, the repose  
 Of earth, sky, sea, and air, was vivified  
 Beneath ‘the random bield of clod or stone,’  
 Myriads of daisies have shone forth in flower  
 Near the lark’s nest, and, in their natural hour,  
 Have pass’d away, less happy than the one  
 That by the unwilling ploughshare died to prove  
 The tender charm of poetry and love.”

Another poem, composed under the same circumstances as the “Mountain-Daisy,” was that on turning up, with the plough, the nest of a field-mouse. It is conceived in the same vein of imagination, and of feeling the association of the mishaps of his own life with that of the little creature:—

“I’m truly sorry man’s dominion  
 Has broken nature’s social union,  
 An’ justifies that ill opinion  
 Which makes thee startle  
 At me, thy poor earth-born companion  
 An’ fellow-mortal!”

The lesson of generosity, like mercy twice blessed,—to him that gives and him that takes,—is exquisitely told, when he bids the wee thief welcome to nibble at the eorn:—

“I’ll get a blessing wi’ the lave,  
 And never miss’t!”

“The Cotter’s Saturday Night” was first recited to his brother as they walked together on a Sunday afternoon, a poem which, by its admirable soothing tone of reverence for holy things, a noble tribute to Scottish piety, has best served to shield the poet’s memory from harsh judgments on his frailties. With Burns’s quick apprehension, he was living a life which placed him in close communion with nature; and, though he delighted chiefly in portraying the stormy aspects of the elements, he did not overlook the minuter appearances worthy also of a poet’s eye, as in that admirable piece of humorous imagination and vigorous thought, “The Brigs of Ayr,” the couplet describing the formation of ice:—

“The chilly frost, beneath the silver beam  
 Crept gently—crusting o’er the glittering stream.”

And then the passage, rising to a higher strain of fancy, after the talk of the Auld Brig and the New is over :—

“What further clishmaclaver might been said,  
 What bloody wars, if sprites had blood to shed  
 No man can tell ; but all before their sight  
 A fairy train appear'd in order bright ;  
 Adown the glittering stream they featly danced ;  
 Bright to the moon their various dresses glanced :  
 They footed o'er the watery glass so neat,  
 The infant ice scarce bent beneath their feet.”

This fairy passage carries me in thought hastily to what Burns always thought, and rightly too, the best of all his productions, the matchless “Tam O'Shanter.” Short as it is, it is a great poem, with merits unassailable by the most rigid criticism, and which the most enthusiastic cannot exaggerate. It is wonderful, especially for the power which harmonizes the terrific and the laughable,—a Shakspearian blending of tragedy and comedy. It was the work of a single day, composed by the river-side, where his wife found the bard crooning to himself, and soon, with strange and wild gestures, in a fit of ungovernable joy, bursting out loudly in one of the most animated passages. There is great dramatic power in the poem :—the spirited introduction of the hero ; the first allusion to the bewitched spot he was to pass by ; the forewarning of witchcraft in his wife's affectionate and cheerful predictions ;—

“She prophesied that, late or soon,  
 Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon ;  
 Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk  
 By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.”

The arch reference to lengthy conjugal counsels ;—

“Ah, gentle dames ! it gars me greet,  
 To think how mony counsels sweet,  
 How mony lengthen'd sage advices,  
 The husband frae the wife despises !”

The convivial exultation of the reprobate and his cronies, set forth in two lines, the most vivid that revelry was ever told in ;—

“Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,  
 O'er a' the ills o' life victorious.”

The transition from the careless, riotous enjoyment at the warm ingle-side, by a different strain, giving one of the happiest imaginative illustrations in the range of poetry ;—

“But pleasures are like poppies spread :  
 You seize the flower, its bloom is shed ;

Or like the snow falls in the river,  
A moment white,—then melts for ever!”

Tam's midnight ride, and his approach to the haunted kirk, after passing several spots, each having its own peculiar awe in some deed of death likely to leave a ghost behind:—where a pedlar had been smothered in the snow; where a drunken traveller had broken his neck; where a murdered bairn was found by the hunters; and where some old woman had hung herself;—

“Nae man can tether time or tide,  
The hour approaches Tam maun ride;  
That hour of night's black arch the key-stane,  
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in,  
And sic a night he tak's the road in  
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.  
The wind blew as 't wad blawn its last;  
The rattling showers rose on the blast;  
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd,  
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd;  
That night a child might understand  
The deil had business on his hand.  
Weel mounted on his gray mare Meg  
(A better never lifted leg),  
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,  
Despising wind, and rain, and fire,  
Whiles holding fast his guid blue bonnet,  
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet,  
Whiles glowering round wi' prudent cares,  
Lest bogles catch him unawares;  
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,  
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.”

“Heroic Tam,” with a drunken heroism, rides on over the haunted ground, his ear beaten by wild, and, thus far, only natural, sounds, the waves of the Doon roaring with an angry flood, the tossing branches of the trees, and the incessant echoing of the thunders, when to his eye, dazzled by quick alternations of lightning and a mirk midnight,—

“Glimmering through the groaning trees,  
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze;  
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing,  
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.”

The scene that followed I shall not attempt either to quote or to describe:—witchcraft with all its intensity; what you feel inclined sometimes to laugh at, but, before you venture to do so, a shudder creeps over you at the mention of the Wicked One's horrid playthings;

but that hideous image as appalling as any terror in Shakspeare's sorcery:—

“Coffins stood round, like open presses,  
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;  
And, by some devilish cantrip slight,  
Each in its cauld hand held a light.”

The hideousness of the supernatural scene is aggravated by the introduction of one human being mingling in the spectral revelry,—a woman who had dealings in witchcraft. The scene suddenly changes; for, when Tam's silent amazement gave way to an impudent exclamation of applause at the agility of the beldame dancer,—

“In an instant all was dark,  
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied  
When out the hellish legion sallied.”

The chase by the witches, and Tam's very narrow escape across the running stream with the loss of his gray mare's tail, bring the poem to an appropriate ending. It won an immediate popularity, for it was circulated among the Scottish cottages, and one peasant did not meet another without one or both indulging in quotations. This had been the case also with Burns's earlier poems. Allan Cunningham mentions the fact of his father's having procured the volume from a Cameronian clergyman, with this remarkable admonition:—“Keep it out of the way of your children, Johu, lest ye catch them, as I caught mine, reading it on the Sabbath.” One very remarkable evidence of the popularity of “Tam O'Shanter” is the fact that it made the churchyard of Alloway's old haunted kirk quite a fashionable burial-place: for the neighbouring gentry began to vie with humbler worth and noteless industry, in finding in its little area room for their last resting-place.

I do not attempt to trace the course of Burns's personal story closely, as it is connected with his poetic career, as in the affecting incident of his love for Mary Campbell, and his pathetic lament over her as his “Highland Mary.” On every leading event his poetic heart spake from its fulness, as when what he called a bitter blast of misfortune's cold “nor'-west” was near driving him from his native land, and he wrote, in obvious allusion to himself, the stanzas “On a Scottish Bard gone to the West Indies:”—

“Auld cantie Kyle may weepers wear,  
An' stain them wi' the saut, saut tear;  
'T will mak' her poor auld heart, I fear,  
In flinders flee;  
He was her laureate monie a year  
That's owre the sea.



“He ne’er was gien to great misguiding,  
 Yet coin his pouches wad na bide in;  
 Wi’ him it ne’er was under hiding:  
     He dealt it free;  
 The Muse was a’ that he took pride in  
     That’s owre the sea.

“Jamaica bodies, usc him weel,  
 An’ hap him in a cozie biel:  
 Ye’ll find him ay a dainty chiel,  
     And fu o’ glee;  
 He wad na wrang’d the vera deil  
     That’s owre the sea.”

The introduction of Burns to Edinburgh society, and his intercourse with it, were hurtful to the moral growth of his genius. It brought him into a closer contact with life, presenting the inequality of human condition, especially amid aristocratic institutions. His own sense of independence, and of his own intrinsic intellectual worth, was strong enough to make him realize social inequality, but not strong enough to raise him above it to a magnanimous contentment:—

“See yonder poor, o’erlabour’d wight,  
 So abject, mean, and vile,  
 Who begs a brother of the earth  
 To give him leave to toil.

“If I’m design’d yon lordling’s slave,  
 By nature’s law design’d,  
 Why was an independent wish  
 E’er planted in my mind?”

Kindly as a peasant-poet was received in Edinburgh, he detected that often in that kindness there was condescension; and, with a sensibility as tremblingly exquisite as his sense was strong, he suspected, as has been remarked by one of his biographers, “that the professional metaphysicians who applauded his rapturous bursts surveyed them, in reality, with something of the same feeling which attends a skilful surgeon’s inspection of a curious specimen of morbid anatomy.” “I doubt,” said Burns himself, in a private record, “whether one man may pour out his bosom, his every thought and floating fancy, his very inmost soul, with unreserving confidence, to another, without hazard of losing part of that respect which man deserves from man, or, from the unavoidable imperfections attending human nature, of one day repenting his confidence.” Happy would it have been could Burns have held his spirit at the elevation which he reaches in another strain:—

"It's no in titles nor in rank ;  
 It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,  
 To purchase peace and rest ;  
 It's no in books, it's no in lear  
 To make us truly blest.

\* \* \* \*

Think ye that sic as you and I,  
 Wha drudge and drive thro' wet an' dry,  
 Wi' never ceasing toil,—  
 Think ye, are we less blest than they  
 Wha scarcely tent us in their way,  
 As hardly worth their while ? "

Happier still would it have been could he have realized one of his purest aspirations :—

"To make a happy fireside clime  
 For weans and wife,  
 That's the true pathos and sublime  
 Of human life."

The question as to the morality of Burns's poetry may be reduced to a simple statement. That he, in his way of life, departed widely from paths which his conscience vainly persuaded him to, in opposition to ungovernable passions, cannot and ought not to be concealed. He never debased himself to a sottish intemperance, but sought convivial excitement, and the worst relief from morbid bodily affections brought on by premature distress. He has uttered a touching appeal for charitable judgments :—

"Gently scan your brother man,  
 Still gentler sister woman ;  
 Though they may gang a kennin' wrang !  
 To step aside is human :  
 One point must still be greatly dark,—  
 The moving why they do it:  
 And just as lamely can ye mark  
 How far perhaps they rue it.

"Who made the heart, 't is He alone  
 Decidedly can try us ;  
 He knows each chord—its various tone,  
 Each spring—its various bias :  
 Then at the balance let 's be mute ;  
 We never can adjust it :  
 What 's done we partly may compute,  
 But know not what 's resisted."

His poetry has been charged—falsely, it seems to me—with a contempt or affectation of prudence, decency, and regularity, and an admir-

ation of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility; in short, with a belief in the dispensing power of genius in all matters of morality. Burns had too much masculine good sense ever to fall into that wretched fallacy. He never so deceived himself. Wild words, indeed, often broke from him; and once, in well-known lines, most wrongly, perhaps somewhat impiously, he pleaded that the light which led astray was light from heaven. But he has written enough of self-condemnation, self-reproach, to show he did not think so. Who can doubt this on reading that sincere and solemn avowal in the stanzas he styled "The Bard's Epitaph"?—as touching a confession as ever was composed:—

- "Is there a whim-inspired fool,  
Owre fast for thought, owre hot for rule,  
Owre blate to seek, owre proud to snool?  
Let him draw near,  
And owre this grassy heap sing dool,  
And drap a tear.
- "Is there a bard of rustic song,  
Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,  
That weekly this area throng?  
Oh, pass not by!  
But, with a frater-feeling strong  
Here heave a sigh.
- "Is there a man whose judgment clear  
Can others teach the course to steer,  
Yet runs himself life's mad career  
Wild as the wave?  
Here pause, and, through the starting tear,  
Survey this grave.
- "The poor inhabitant below  
Was quick to learn and wise to know,  
And keenly felt the friendly glow  
And softer flame;  
But thoughtless follies laid him low,  
And stain'd his name.
- "Reader, attend: whether thy soul  
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,  
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole  
In low pursuit;  
Know, prudent, cautious self-control  
Is wisdom's root."

That grave for which this epitaph in fancy was meant has been visited by those who perhaps deemed the poor inhabitant below to have been no better than a miserable drunkard, by others who wrongly condemned

him for having perverted his great endowment to the vindication of moral lawlessness. It has been, too, visited phrenologically. The phrenologists, as Allan Cunningham sarcastically describes the affair, disinterred the skull, applied their compasses, and satisfied themselves that Burns had capacity equal to the composition of "Tam O'Shanter," "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and "Mary in Heaven." "Oh for an hour of Burns for these men's sakes!" exclaims a kindred spirit: "were there a witch of Endor in Scotland, it would be an act of comparative piety in her to bring up his spirit: to stigmatize them in verses that would burn for ever would be a gratification for which he might think it worth while to be thus brought again upon earth." All mankind have heard of the malediction which Shakspeare utters from his monument, and of the dread which came upon the boors of Stratford-upon-Avon as they presumed to gaze upon his dust. No such fears, however, fell upon the craniologists of Dumfries. The clock struck one as they touched the dread relic: they tried their hats upon the head and found them all too little, and, having made a mould, they deposited the skull in a leaden box, carefully lined with the softest materials, and returned it once more to the hallowed ground.

The grave has been visited by those who brought a better power and a better purpose,—a poet and his sister. He has described their finding it in a corner of the churchyard; and, looking at it with melancholy and painful reflections, they repeated to each other his own verses beginning—

"Is there a man whose judgment clear?"

"He, taking the music of that epitaph, has given what is at once the best tribute to the dead and the best warning to the living. I know of no fitter close for this lecture than Wordsworth's lines "To the Sons of Burns, after visiting their father's grave."

" 'Mid crowded obelisks and urns,  
 I sought the untimely grave of Burns:  
 Sons of the Bard, my heart still mourns  
     With sorrow true;  
 And more would grieve, but that it turns  
     Trembling to you!  
 "Through twilight shades of good and ill  
 Ye now are panting up life's hill;  
 And more than common strength and skill  
     Must ye display,  
 If ye would give the better will  
     Its lawful sway.

- “Hath nature strung your nerves to bear  
Intemperance with less harm, beware !  
But if the poet's wit ye share,—  
    Like him can speed  
The social hour,—of tenfold care  
    There will be need.
- “For honest men delight will take  
To spare your failings for his sake ;  
Will flatter you,—and fool and rake  
    Your steps pursue,  
And of your father's name will make  
    A snare for you.
- “Far from their noisy haunts retire,  
And add your voices to the quire  
That sanctify the cottage fire  
    With service meet :  
There seek the genius of your sire ;  
    His spirit greet.
- “Or where, 'mid 'lonely heights and hows,'  
He paid to nature tuneful vows,  
Or wiped his honourable brows  
    Bedew'd with toil,  
While reapers strove, or busy ploughs  
    Upturn'd the soil.
- “His judgment with benignant ray  
Shall guide, his fancy cheer, your way ;  
But ne'er to a seductive lay  
    Let faith be given,  
Nor deem that 'light which leads astray  
    Is light from heaven.'
- “Let no mean hope your souls enslave ;  
Be independent, generous, brave :  
Your father such example gave,  
    And such revere ;  
But be admonish'd by his grave,  
    And think and fear !”



## LECTURE XI.

### *Contemporary Literature.*

THE PRESENT AGE NOT AN UNPOETICAL ONE—FIVE NAMES WORTHY OF DISTINCTION—SAMUEL ROGERS—THE “PLEASURES OF MEMORY”—ROGERS’S “ITALY”—GALILEO AND MILTON—MOORE’S SONGS—IRISH PATRIOTISM—THE TRUE QUESTION RESPECTING POETICAL COMPOSITION—LAMB’S LINES ON THE “OLD FAMILIAR FACES”—SCOTT’S CAREER OF AUTHORSHIP—SCOTT THE SECOND IN RANK OF SCOTTISH POETS—HIS CHILDHOOD AT SANDY KNOWE—HIS EARLY READING—HIS INTERVIEW WITH BURNS—INFLUENCE OF THE STORY OF THE REBELLION OF 1745 ON HIS GENIUS—HIS LOVE OF NATURAL SCENERY—THE MINSTRELSY OF THE SCOTTISH BORDER—HALLAM’S REMARK ON THE SCOTTISH BALLADS—STORY OF CHRISTIE’S WILL—“THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL”—SCOTT’S MERIT AS A POET—INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ON HIS MIND—“MARMION”—“THE LADY OF THE LAKE”—DECLINE OF HIS POETICAL POWERS—“BONNY DUNDEE”—“BATTLE OF OTTERBURNE”—HIS PILGRIMAGE TO ITALY.

THIS course of lectures, so kindly and patiently followed by you, has now brought us to the limit of the poets of a past generation. The lives of those two true poets who were last considered reached the closing years of the last century,—the death of Burns having taken place in the year 1796, and that of Cowper in 1800. The mind naturally draws a boundary-line which separates them from the poets of the present century and our own times. The remaining lectures will be appropriated to some of our contemporaries who have devoted their genius to the cultivation of that vast and noble field of English literature we have been travelling over.

It is quite an habitual opinion to characterize the generation of the nineteenth century as unpoetical; and in many respects, it must be confessed, the censure is well directed. But when the philosophic critic of some future age shall seek to judge us, the judgment will be a different one. We are apt to form our estimate with minds diverted to the countless agencies visibly at work around us,—to the various manifestations of the busy, bustling, superficial temper of the times, which leads men to seek the unsure and brief support of mere expedients, instead of the constancy and security of abiding principles. There are perpetually obtruded on our notice some traits of the times, showing the race occupied rather with the world of sense than with strenuous efforts of thought or high aspirations of imagination. But these—the

more obvious characteristics—are temporary; they pass away, and in their place remain those which are more durable. When some future literary historian shall come to write the character of his ancestry in the early portion of the nineteenth century, he will seek for evidences of that character, not in such things as from time to time flash upon us, awakening some admiration or amazement, but in the surviving literature of the generation, and especially in the imaginative department of it, which, gaining a wider and more permanent command of the sympathies, has therefore a most lasting life. It endures from age to age, and to it men of other times are apt to look as the mirror of the generation to which that literature belonged. It is a somewhat vain and perhaps presumptuous thing to attempt to gain futurity for a point of imaginative vision, and thus anticipate the judgment of posterity. As far as we may indulge in such speculation, we may fancy some eye as yet unborn, conning what is now the fair page of some fresh book, but then turned into the “sere and yellow leaf;” and if it should chance to be a page on which is inscribed some shallow piece of pride in the superiority of the age,—some ostentation of the incomparable advancement of physical science or the mechanic arts, or of universal education and the march of mind, or some loud boasting of political regeneration,—it might prompt the compassionate smile at such ebullitions of inordinate and short-sighted vanity; short-sighted, because these are matters in which, great as may be the achievements of one generation, they are usually outstripped and set aside by those of a succeeding generation. From such manifestations of our character we might be pronounced a sensuous, unimaginative generation. Self-centred, self-seeking, self-satisfied, prone to divorce the present from both past and future, breaking covenant with the mighty dead by irreverent violation of time-honoured institutions and usages, as being, according to the phrase, behind the times, and not looking with prophetic eye to days that are to come. But the chief evidence of the character of an age is sought in its literature; and, contemplating that of our times, the writer of some distant day will find that there flourished during the early period of the nineteenth century a numerous company of poets, and among them not a few truly inspired, who would do honour to any age. Indeed, unimaginative and unpoetic as we are, too often, in the habit of considering the generation of our own times, if we measure both the amount and merit and variety of the poetry which has been produced within the last thirty or forty years, this age, in the annals of English poetry, is surpassed only by the golden age of Queen Elizabeth, with which, indeed, it may not inappropriately be compared.

The list of successful poets in our times is, in truth, a registry which contrasts finely with the poverty of several former periods; and, on approaching what may be called our contemporaries' poetry, I have found a necessity of making some selection from a numerous company of poets who would all be entitled to consideration in a more extended course. I have, therefore, chosen five names as worthy of chief distinction, hoping to be able occasionally to present some incidental notices of those to whom more space would, under other circumstances, be due. The choice names—chosen not without reflection, and with regard to their eminence and their influence—are the names of Scott, Coleridge, Southey, Byron, and Wordsworth. The ranks of the poets of the nineteenth century have been already thinned by death. Of the five names just repeated but two survive, and only one in the unimpaired possession of his genius. That one has witnessed the passing away of his brother bards, in quick succession too, within the last few years,—a speedy action of death, not lost upon the thoughtful imagination of the survivor:—

“ Like clouds which rake the mountain summit,  
Or waves that own no curbing hand,  
How fast has brother follow'd brother  
From sunshine to the sunless land !

“ Yet I, whose lids from infant slumbers  
Were earlier raised, remain to hear  
A timid voice, that asks, in whispers,  
Who next will drop and disappear ? ”

Byron, and Scott, and Coleridge, and Crabbe, and the Ettrick Shepherd,—as he is called, to escape the unpoetic name of James Hogg,—and Mrs. Hemans, each having filled a space in the literature of this century, are in their graves. The survivors, not a few in number, are for the most part mute in song as the dead; but, to appreciate the extent of living poetic power, it is only necessary to recall the names of Rogers, and Campbell, and Moore, and Milman, and Southey, and Wordsworth, to say nothing of some others of good repute.

It is a noticeable fact, that among the poets of our days the one who first gained an honourable award of reputation, the first and oldest of them all, is still among the living, “ a worthy and a prosperous gentleman,”—the poet Samuel Rogers. He came into public notice as the author of the “Pleasures of Memory,” which appeared during the last century; and he is now living in cheerful and esteemed old age, after a life of purity and affluent elegance, on the verge of eighty years. He stands truly the patriarch of the poets of the nineteenth century; and,

as such, honour should first be done to him before I pass on to the chief subjects of this and the succeeding lectures.

Rogers's first poem was produced at a time most propitious to the acquisition of a general popularity. It was a period of poetical dearth. The career of Burns as well as of Cowper were well nigh over when this poem upon the pleasurable emotions of memory was cordially and widely welcomed to supply a void in the public mind.

It was on a theme of universal interest and of ready comprehension, and abounding in a succession of pleasing pictures, rather than presenting any lofty efforts of imagination; and, therefore, it is not surprising that it should have won, under such circumstances, a wide-spread favour. At the present day, or even somewhat later than the publication of the "Pleasures of Memory," I do not think it could have secured so favourable a reception. There has since been so much of the stronger inspiration, that the avenue to a poetic reputation is by no means so open to entrance. Indeed, this is shown by the state of popular opinion respecting some of Rogers's later poems. His "Italy," for example, seems to me to show a far more vigorous and cultivated imagination,—to be, in a word, a greatly superior poem to his first poem; but Rogers's name became first known as the poet of Memory, and as such will it be preserved. Passages of genuine poetry are scattered through his "Italy," giving it a higher value than is perhaps recognised. It is a descriptive poem, finely enriched, as descriptive poetry should be, with moral associations, in the present case arising chiefly from historical and biographical allusions. The interesting visit of the young Milton, a traveller in Italy, to the aged Galileo, is thus introduced and fitly touched:—

"Nearer we hail  
Thy sunny slope, Arcetri, sung of old  
For its green wine,—dearer to me, to most,  
As dwelt on by that great astronomer,  
Seven years a prisoner at the city-gate,  
Let in but in his grave-clothes. Sacred be  
His cottage; (justly was it call'd the jewel!)  
Sacred the vineyard where, while yet his sight  
Glimmer'd, at blush of dawn he dress'd his vines,  
Chanting aloud, in gaiety of heart,  
Some verse of Ariosto. There, unseen,  
In manly beauty, Milton stood before him,  
Gazing with reverent awe,—Milton his guest,  
Just then come forth, all life and enterprise:  
*He* in his old age and extremity,  
Blind, at noonday exploring with his staff,



His eyes upturn'd as to the golden sun,  
 His eyeballs idly rolling. Little then  
 Did Galileo think whom he bade welcome;  
 That in his hand he held the hand of one  
 Who could requite him,—who would spread his name  
 O'er lands and seas,—great as himself, nay, greater :  
 Milton as little that in him he saw,  
 As in a glass, what he himself should be,  
 Destined so soon to fall on evil days  
 And evil tongues,—so soon, alas! to live  
 In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round  
 And solitude."

[There is a break in the manuscript here, which I have found it impossible to repair. Diligent search has been made for the missing matter, but without success.—ED.]

In the last lecture I had occasion to make some remarks on the subject of lyrical poetry, and its demand for a highly-musical versification and a variety of rhythm. The remarks were connected with the higher department of lyrical composition,—the Ode,—but now lead me to mention slightly the numerous contributions of a living poet of another department of lyrical poetry. No English writer, that I am aware of, has produced so many songs as Moore. Familiar, too, by musical accompaniments, they have gained a wide popularity by the alliance of many a sweet voice that has sung them. But, as a matter of poetry and not of music, a good song is an exceedingly rare production. In the whole extent of English poetry the number is quite small. Moore, prolific song-writer as he has been, has written much fewer of decided merit than would be supposed, considering the success they have had. When you come, for instance, to read over his "Irish Melodies," you find too much elaboration, too much of art,—strains of overwrought and artificially-stimulated fancy. They want the simplicity, the natural impulse and emotion, the bird-like utterance, which characterize the song of the true lyrical poet. The musical accompaniments of Moore's songs have served not only to give them their due effect, but also to conceal their faults. This is perceived when they are simply read. But at the same time, the poet's merit is considerable in the variety of his versification, and many of his songs display his skill in developing the compass of English metres. The following stanzas are much simpler in style than Moore's usual strain, and a more peculiar measure than he often uses. With something of his bright fancy, they are not devoid of a pleasing plaintiveness :—

Bright be thy dreams ! May all thy weeping  
 Turn into smiles while thou art sleeping !



Those by sea or death removed,  
 Friends who in thy spring-time knew thee,  
 All thou 'st ever prized or loved,  
 In dreams come smiling to thee !  
 There may the child whose love lay deepest,  
 Dearest of all, come while thou sleepest ;  
 Still be the same,—no e harm forgot,  
 Nothing lost that life had given ;  
 Or, if changed, but changed to what  
 Thou 'lt find her yet in heaven !

There is much more of the true poetic fire in some of Moore's national than in his amatory lyrics. They glow with a very impetuous fervour of patriotism,—Irish patriotism, of which it has been said, half in jest and half in earnest, that it is something very like British treason. Be that as it may, when his theme is poor, misruled, poverty-stricken Ireland, there is the air and tone more of reality in his effusions. They come more from the heart, as seems to be the case with these energetic lines :—

“ Oh, where 's the slave so lowly,  
 Condemn'd to chains unholy,  
 Who, could he burst  
 His bonds at first,  
 Would pine beneath them slowly ?  
 What soul, whose wrongs degrade it,  
 Would wait till time decay'd it,  
 When thus its wing  
 At once may spring  
 To the throne of Him who made it ?  
 Farewell, Erin ! farewell, all  
 Who live to weep our fall !

“ Less dear the laurel growing  
 Alive, untouch'd, and blowing,  
 Than that whose braid  
 Is pluck'd to shade ?  
 The brows with victory glowing,  
 We tread the land that bore us ;  
 Her green flag glitters o'er us ;  
 The friends we 've tried  
 Are by our side,  
 And the foe we hate before us !  
 Farewell, Erin ! farewell, all  
 Who live to weep our fall !

Let me take this opportunity to remark, that Moore's poetry may well serve to illustrate the difference between true natural feeling and that bright and often delusive reflection of it which our language sup-

plies a very apt term to describe,—sentimentality. It is a counterfeit resemblance of sentiment, and very current in poetry. There are few points on which it is more important for the reader to be able to discriminate between the reality and the shadow, especially as they are often separated by almost imperceptible lines. Moore, for instance, has written a great number of very pretty things; but the reader must have a low estimate of the art who supposes that it is merely pretty things which constitute good poetry. Often the fancy is touched, and it will be thought the heart is touched too, when in truth its pulses may be beating all the while as sluggishly as ever. The gentle and even pulsations of sentimentality are very often mistaken for the strong stirrings of the feelings; and, if that confusion were done away with, it is wonderful how much false and sickly poetry would be done away at the same time. The reader of poetry is often exposed to this imposition; for there are writers whose delight it is to dally with the feelings as if they were mere playthings, to be tricked out in the finery of pretty words and figures and affectations; whereas a genuine emotion is a strong and simple utterance from the very depths of the poet's heart, arrayed it may be, but not encumbered, by the glory which his imagination gives to it. There are a great many verses in the literature of all nations in which the display of sentiment is considerable, but it is all on the surface. It is the thin soil of sentimentality, fit only to sustain the growth of a few slight flowers. We should be prepared, therefore, to ask ourselves the question respecting poetical composition, "Is there real feeling here?" We should seek to satisfy ourselves that the poet truly and imaginatively experienced the emotion for which he asks our sympathy, and that it is not mere affectation and exaggeration. Nor is it always easy to discriminate; for sentimentality is not so much an absolute mockery of real sentiment as it is sentiment dressed up in fine clothes. Besides, it is to be borne in mind that a powerful emotion, when joined with a strong imagination, will grasp at thoughts and images which might be judged too remote, but which it makes its own. This is one of the most natural and legitimate functions of the poetic faculty, and which reconciles the highest acts of the imagination with the most sincere and deepest feeling. This is, I believe, a kind of mystery to some persons, who are inclined to doubt the possibility of a man's feeling strongly what he expresses in verse, as if poetry were universally an empty shadow,—an unreal imitation of real emotions. So very often it is; and this makes it necessary to distinguish. It is a matter of very serious misapprehension in the reading of poetry; and, as the materials for illustration are at hand let me briefly exemplify.

Those lines of Charles Lamb on the "Old Familiar Faces," which I have this evening repeated, express a feeling which has, I presume, been experienced by every one who is now listening to me,—that painfully hollow sense of destitution when there comes across us the memory of faces familiar to some former period of life; the craving after the departed; the missing of something which had been a portion of our very selves, incorporated in our existence. Several of the stanzas go on to mention the memory of what has been and never more will be. This is told in language as simple as possible,—just such words as the feeling would express itself in, finding natural utterance in earnest conversation, being only distinguished by a metrical construction of equal simplicity. But suddenly, as the feeling is dwelt upon, the imagination expands, and, as the shadowy recollections of childhood—memories of the old familiar faces—throng around him, the mourner feels the spectre-like haunting of the scenes of childhood, and his loneliness makes the earth a very desert:—

" Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood,  
Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,  
Seeking to find the old familiar faces."

This strikes me as a genuine burst of true imaginative emotion. No one can for a moment doubt the perfect sincerity of the poet's feelings. By the side of it let me place a piece of fanciful, sentimental poetry,—a fair specimen of that sort,—turning on much the same memory of departed youth and gladness. It is one of Moore's melodies,—well-known verses, and so familiar, no doubt, to the ears of many of you in connection with their musical accompaniment, that they may sound rather oddly under the rude handling of criticism:—

" Oft in the stilly night,  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,  
Fond memory brings the light  
Of other days around me :—  
The smiles, the tears  
Of boyhood's years,  
The words of love then spoken ;  
The eyes that shone,  
Now dimm'd and gone,  
The cheerful hearts, now broken.  
Thus, in the stilly night,  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,  
Sad memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.

"When I remember all  
     The friends, so link'd together,  
 I've seen around me fall,  
     Like leaves in wintry weather,  
     I feel like one  
     Who treads alone  
 Some banquet-hall deserted,  
     Whose lights are fled,  
     Whose garlands dead,  
 And all but he departed.  
 Thus, in the stilly night,  
     Ere slumber's chain has bound me,  
 Sad memory brings the light  
     Of other days around me."

In passing to the consideration of the chief name to be presented in this lecture, let it be remembered that that brilliant chapter in English literature, the *Waverley Novels*, is not comprehended within the scope of the present course. That Scott's principal fame will rest upon them I entertain no doubt; but we have at present to deal only with the character of his poems. Scott's career of authorship was probably the most amazing that has ever been witnessed in any country, whether we consider it with reference to its almost inexhaustible fertility, its substantial remuneration, or its wide-spread popularity and the innocent gratification afforded to an incalculable number of readers. His poems form comparatively but a small proportion of all his productions. The rapid and brilliant popularity of Scott's poetry has been eclipsed by his imaginative prose, and thus people have often allowed themselves to judge of that poetry carelessly, disregarding it as a thing gone by and superseded. That is hardly fair; for poetry which had won a general admiration by no unworthy arts is entitled to a more deliberate judgment to know both the grounds of that popularity and the causes of its decline. Turning, then, away from the *Waverley Novels* as from a subject unconnected with this course of lectures, interesting as a general criticism of them might be, I must confine myself to the consideration of the character of Walter Scott as a poet.

In my last lecture I had occasion to allude to the influence of the traditionary minstrelsy in the development of Burns: it was an influence still more strikingly manifested upon the character of Scott, the second in rank of the Scottish poets. The succession had been quickly followed; for it was in the very year of Burns's death that Scott's first attempt in verse was published. His first attempts were not successful, for they were made in a track not truly congenial for the development

of his powers. His first impulse was taken, not from the indigenous poetry of his own land, but from the ballads of German poets,—a foreign literature which acquired a short-lived popularity in the closing years of the last century. Imitation of the German ballad-poetry was not the true direction of the young poet's genius, which was destined to receive an impulse more effectual because more Scottish. The study of the ballads of some of the German poets was a mere matter of fashion among the literary circles of Edinburgh society; and Scott, quick in his apprehensions, was naturally affected by it for a season.

A much more abiding influence had begun earlier, and is to be traced back to a very early period of his life. In his second year, by a sudden paralysis, Walter Scott was a cripple for life, the unformed strength of the tottering infant having then been stricken by a malady of old age. Among various remedies, he was sent from Edinburgh to dwell for a time in the open air of a neighbouring farm, where the regimen which invigorated his sickly frame wrought manifestly on his genius. It was at Sandy Knowe that his education began, his first teacher an illiterate shepherd, and the infant-school the rough ground of a Scottish sheepfold. When the old man went forth to watch the flocks as they browsed upon the hills, the child was carried along; and Scott long after said it was his delight to roll about upon the grass all the day long in the midst of the flock, and that the fellowship he thus formed with the sheep and lambs had impressed his mind with a degree of affectionate feeling towards them which lasted through life. Such, with his earliest consciousness of existence, was the beginning of his education,—the shepherd and the shepherd's dog and the flock his daily companions. But, more than this, he was thus placed in familiar intercourse with nature herself; and no one can divine how it is that the material world around us exercises its influence upon the spiritual world within us. It is no overstrained fancy to say that the senses of the little child began even then to be tributary to his imagination and his moral being. For what an image of the poet's childhood is presented in the tradition illustrative of such influences, which tells of his having been one day forgotten among the knolls in a thunder-storm, and being found lying on his back, clapping his hands at the lightning, and crying out "Bonny! bonny!" at every flash!

Another part of his education consisted of the old songs and tales familiar to his daily companions as the lore appropriate to the spot itself; for the summit overhanging the farm-house commanded the prospect of a district of which it was said every field had its battle, and every rivulet its song. With these the child became familiar, thus, no



doubt, acquiring much before he could read. But, besides his communings with the outward world, and with the minstrelsy with which, it may be almost said without exaggeration, the air was filled, there is one reminiscence which shows that his mind must early have dwelt with some earnestness on the pages of books. A lady writes to Mr. Lockhart that she distinctly remembers a sickly boy sitting at the gate of the house of one of his relatives, with his attendant, when a poor mendicant approached, old and woe-begone, to claim alms. When the man was retiring, the servant remarked to Walter that he ought to be thankful to Providence for having placed him above the want and misery he had been contemplating. The child looked up with a half-wistful, half-incredulous expression, and said, "*Homer was a beggar.*" "How do you know that?" said the other. "Why, do n't you remember," answered he,—

"Seven *Roman* cities strove for Homer dead,  
Through which the living Homer begg'd his bread?"

The lady smiled at the "*Roman* cities;" but already

"Each blank in faithless memory void  
The poet's glowing thoughts supplied."

This is a small matter, and so, in one sense, are all things respecting children; but there seems to us a ray of true genius in such thinking of so mere a child,—the finding in beggary an association between the idea of Homer and the mendicant, and then by a process of imagination investing the Scotch pauper with somewhat of the dignity of the prince of bards.

With Scott, the influence of tuition—that which is often exclusively styled education—bore an unusually small proportion to the self-education on which his genius chiefly relied. This was, perhaps, in some measure of necessity the case, for the ordinary school-process, at first delayed by his bodily infirmity, was interrupted by the general feebleness of his health. The boy, however, had acquired an impetuous love for reading, and the bent of his intellect was shown by the mastery he gained over the region of imaginative literature. While yet a mere stripling, he had peopled his mind with the old romances, the legendary poetry, the "*Arabian Nights*," and the loftier visions of the English poets. All this was undirected; and it was only a turn for historical pursuits, which never forsook him, that he conceived saved his mind from utter dissipation. Still, the boy's appetite for works of imagination, fierce as it was, was too healthy to feed on trashy fictions. His spirit, taking its first impulse from the Border-song, then roved at will through the fantastic realms of Oriental fiction, the gorgeous gallery of the

"Fairy Queen," the spheres of the "Paradise Lost," and the world revealed upon the pages of Shakspeare.

An interesting evidence of the extent of Scott's early reading, comprehensive not only of the chief English poets, but of many of inferior rank, may be noticed in his reminiscence of his own interview, if it may be so called, with his great predecessor Burns. When the peasant-poet, then in the full flush of his fame, paid his first visit to Edinburgh, Walter Scott was a lad of about fifteen years of age, and was present, on one occasion, when Burns was entertained in the most accomplished society of the Scottish metropolis. There chanced to be shown a print representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting on the one side, and on the other his widow with a child in her arms ; underneath these lines :—

" Cold on Canadian hills or Minden's plain,  
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain,  
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew.  
The big drops, mingling with the milk he drew,  
Gave the sad presage of his future years,  
The child of misery baptized in tears."

Burns was much affected by the print, and asked whose the lines were. It chanced that nobody remembered, except young Walter Scott, that they occurred in a scarcely-known poem by Langhorne. He modestly whispered the information to a friend, who mentioned it to Burns. The kind look with which it was acknowledged was a pleasurable recollection for Scott many a year after.

Scott's poetical character was not only greatly fashioned by the influence of the traditionary minstrelsy, but it was impregnated by an intense nationality ; and this may also be traced to a very early period of his consciousness. During his residence at the farm-house, besides the border legends, the mingled fact and fiction of a remote age, the child's thoughts were made familiar with the nearer story of the sufferings of his countrymen some thirty years before, in the Rebellion of 1745. The vengeance which triumphant England wreaked upon Scotland was freshly remembered by many ; and, as the child listened to the narratives of the atrocities which fastened on the victor the horrid title of the "Butcher Cumberland," there sprang from his childish sympathy a deep affection for his injured country. The smouldering fires of Scottish resentment had burst forth in two wide-spread rebellions in support of the banished family of Stuart, and the power of England over the prostrate cause of the Pretender was maintained by the bloody penalties which followed the victory at Culloden. The Duke of Cum-

berland, hardened in the trade of war, carried English vengeance into every sphere of life: the cottage-hearths were wet with slaughter, and the sounds that went up from the glens of Scotland were the shrieks and the death-moans of famishing women and children. In the language of Smollett's fine lyric, uttered at the time,—

“ When the rage of battle ceased,  
The victor's soul was not appeased :  
The naked and forlorn must feel  
Devouring flames and conquering steel !  
No strains but those of sorrow flow,  
And nought is heard but sounds of woe ;  
Whilst the pale phantoms of the slain  
Glide nightly o'er the silent plain.”

Now, it was in this history that the infant spirit of Walter Scott was nursed; and it is no marvel that thus was kindled in his breast a fervid Scottish feeling, that went out only with the flame of life. It entered into his childish games, as described in one of the poetical epistles prefaced to “ Marmion :”—

“ While, stretch'd at length upon the floor,  
Again I fought each battle o'er ;  
Pebbles and shells in order laid  
The mimic ranks of war display'd ;  
*And onward still the Scottish Lion bore,*  
*And still the scatter'd Southron fled before.”*

From his childhood Walter Scott was trained to be in all his heart a Scotchman. There was much the same feeling as kindled the early aspirations of Burns :—

“ E'en then a wish (I mind its power),  
A wish that to my latest hour  
Shall strongly heave my breast,—  
That I for poor auld Scotland's sake  
Some usefu' plan or book could make,  
Or sing a sang at least.”

Walter Scott's poetry is full of this spirit of nationality,—a mixture of national pride and that peculiar feeling, the filial piety of her children for “ poor auld Scotland.”

Scott's love of natural scenery, especially when associated with historic incidents, had its origin, no doubt, when he was residing in childhood at the farm-house amid the romantic localities at Sandy Knowe. A part of his boyhood was spent in another romantic neighbourhood, within sight of the meeting of two superb rivers,—the Tweed and

Teviot, both renowned in song,—the ruins of an ancient abbey, and the more distant vestiges of Roxburgh Castle. “To this period,” he writes, “I can trace distinctly the awaking of that delightful feeling for the beauties of natural objects which has never since deserted me. The romantic feelings predominating in my mind naturally rested upon and associated themselves with these grand features of the landscape around me, and the historical incidents or traditional legends connected with many of them gave to my admiration a sort of intense impression of reverence which at times made my heart feel too big for my bosom. From this time the love of natural beauty, more especially when combined with ancient ruins or remains of our fathers’ piety or splendour, became with me an insatiable passion, which, if circumstances had permitted, I would willingly have gratified by travelling over half the globe.”

Such were the dawns of the genius of the last and greatest of the border minstrels. It had long been Scott’s delight to gather, wherever he could glean them, the traditions and fragments of the ancient ballads of his own land. These researches, carried on without any definite ulterior object, were storing his imagination with the wealth he was at a future day to pay back a thousand-fold increased. One of his companions in excursions through the region of the Border describes the process well in saying, “He was making himself all the time, but did not know, may be, what he was about, till years had passed. At first he thought of little, I dare say, but the queerness and the fun.” The accumulation of these relics at length led to the conception of the minstrelsy of the Scottish border, and that work decided Scott’s whole career: it was the impulse which moved his genius; it made him a poet; it made him the magician of the Waverley Novels. While engaged in the task—no task, but a delight—of editing the legendary ballads, he gathered about him the materials on which his imagination was to dwell during a career of authorship as astonishing as any the world has known. One of the critics of the day prophetically said that the minstrelsy contained the elements of a hundred romances; and afterwards, at the time when Waverley was a new book and the authorship was a mystery, Professor Wilson exclaimed, “I wonder what all these people are perplexing themselves with: have they forgotten the prose of the minstrelsy?” No one acquainted with that ancient poetry, now accessible in various collections, can fail to appreciate the influence it must have exercised in the development of Scott’s powers,—a point on which we may avail ourselves of the opinion of one of the calmest and most philosophical critics of the age. Mr. Hallam, in his recent invaluable work on the literature of Europe, remarks:—“The Scottish ballads of an historical or legendary



character, especially the former, are ardently poetical: the nameless minstrel is often inspired with an Homeric power of rapid narration, bold description, lively or pathetic touches of sentiment. They are familiar to us through several publications, and chiefly through the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, by one whose genius those indigenous lays had first excited, and whose own writings, when the whole civilized world did homage to his name, never ceased to bear the indelible impress of the associations that had thus been generated."

Scott's first purely original ballads were much more in the vein of German than of Scottish poetry, being highly coloured with the supernatural. The compilation of the *Minstrelsy* brought him home to his true path. It was not a work of mere compilation and collection; for the imperfect traditions often required remodelling and renovation,—a process of great delicacy and difficulty. It demanded original imaginative power, combined with a modest subordination to the tone of the ancient song. This was an admirable school for the training of such talent as Scott was gifted with. It even encouraged a bolder and more vivid strain of composition than he would have ventured on in his early avowedly original writings; for, assuming the position of the ancient minstrel, he spoke with an ancient freedom and fervour. Many of the ballads were completed by him where lines or stanzas were wanting, but the skill with which Scott adopted the style and spirit of an earlier age is especially shown in one which may be considered almost entirely as a modern imitation from his pen, for he speaks of it as not being of unmixed antiquity, but written from the remnant of a few stanzas current upon the border in a corrupted state. The exploit which forms the subject of it has been told also in Scott's agreeable prose. In the reign of Charles I., when the moss-trooping practices were not entirely discontinued, a borderer called Christie's Will was taken on some marauding party and imprisoned in the Tolbooth of Jedburgh. The Earl of Traquair, hearing of it, inquired the cause of his confinement; to which Will replied he was imprisoned for stealing two *tethers*. On being more closely questioned, he acknowledged an omission in his first confession,—the fact of there having been a delicate colt at the end of each tether. The joke amused the earl and gained the prisoner's release. Some time after, a lawsuit came on in which it was known that the opinion of the presiding judge was unfavourable to Lord Traquair's interests. The point to be gained, therefore, was to keep the judge out of the way; and the earl had recourse to Christie's Will, who at once offered his services to kidnap Lord Durie, the obnoxious justiciary. This was accomplished by Will's suddenly seizing the judge from his



horse while riding on the sands of Leith, muffling him in a large cloak, and then escaping into a secluded quarter, where he deposited his weary and terrified burden in an old castle in Annandale. During his confinement in the vault of the castle the only sounds he heard were a shepherd calling his dog and an old woman talking to her cat,—sounds he mistook for the invocations of spirits. The judge's horse being found, it was concluded the rider had been thrown into the sea; his friends went into mourning, and a successor was appointed on the bench. Lord Traquair gained his lawsuit, and Christie's Will was ordered to set the judge at liberty. This was effected in a manner equally mysterious, so that the judge and his friends were fully persuaded that he had been spirited away by witchcraft. Scott, taking these facts and the very imperfect fragments of the lost ballad, has given one of the most successful of the modern imitations:—

- “Traquair has ridden up Chapelhope,  
And sae has he down by the Grey Mare's Tail,  
He never stinted the light gallop  
Until he speer'd for Christie's Will.
- “Now Christie's Will peep'd frae the tower,  
And out at the shot-hole keeked he;  
'And ever unlucky,' quo' he, 'is the hour  
That the warden comes to speer for me!’
- “‘Good Christie's Will, now have nae fear!  
Nae harm, good Will, shall hap to thee;  
I saved thy life at the Jeddart air,  
At the Jeddart air frae the justice tree.
- “‘Bethink how ye sware, by the salt and the bread,  
By the lightning, the wind, and the rain,  
That, if ever of Christie's Will I had need,  
He would pay me my service again.’
- “‘Gramercy, my lord,’ quo' Christie's Will,  
'Gramercy, my lord, for your grace to me!  
When I turn my cheek and claw my neck  
I think of Traquair and the Jeddart tree.’
- “And he has open'd the fair tower-gate  
To Traquair and a' his companie;  
The spule o' the deer on the board he has set,  
The fattest that ran on the Hutton Lee.
- “‘Now, wherefore sit ye sad, my lord?  
And wherefore sit ye mournfullie?  
And why eat ye not of the venison I shot  
At the dead of night on Hutton Lee?’

- “ ‘O, weel may I stint of feast and sport,  
And in my mind be vexéd sair;  
A vote of the canker'd Session Court  
Of land and living will make me bare.
- “ ‘But if auld Durie to heaven were flown,  
Or if auld Durie to hell were gane,  
Or . . . . if he could be but ten days stoun,  
My bonny braid lands would still be my ain.’
- “ ‘O, mony a time, my lord,’ he said,  
‘I’ve stown the horse frae the sleeping loon:  
But for you I’ll steal a beast as braid,  
For I’ll steal Lord Durie frae Edinburgh town.
- “ ‘O, mony a time, my lord,’ he said,  
‘I’ve stown a kiss frae a sleeping wench;  
But for you I’ll do as kittle a deed,  
For I’ll steal an auld lurdane aff the bench.’
- “ And Christie’s Will is to Edinburgh gane;  
At the Burrough Muir then enter’d he;  
And, as he pass’d the gallow-stane,  
He cross’d his brow and he bent his knee.
- “ He lighted at Lord Durie’s door,  
And there he knock’d most manfullie;  
And up and spake Lord Durie sae stour,  
‘What tidings, thou stalward groom, to me?’
- “ ‘The fairest lady in Teviotdale  
Has sent, maist reverent sir, for thee;  
She pleas at the session for her land, a’haill,  
And fain she wad plead her cause to thee.’
- “ ‘But how can I to that lady ride  
With saving of my dignitie?’  
‘O, a curch and mantle ye may wear,  
And in my cloak ye sall muffled be.’
- “ Wi’ curch on head and cloak ower face,  
He mounted the judge on a palfrey fyne;  
He rode away, a right round pace,  
And Christie’s Will held the bridle-reyn.
- “ The Lothian edge they were not o’er,  
When they heard bugles bauldly ring,  
And, hunting over Middleton Moor,  
They met, I ween, our noble king.
- “ When Willie look’d upon our king,  
I wot, a frightened man was he!  
But ever auld Durie was startled mair,  
For tyning of his dignitie.

- “ The king he cross’d himself, I wis,  
 When as the pair came riding bye;  
 An uglier crone and a sturdier loon,  
 I think, were never seen with eye.
- “ Willie has hied to the tower of Greæme,  
 And he took auld Durie on his back;  
 He shot him down to the dungeon deep,  
 Which garr’d his auld banes gie mony a crack.
- “ For nineteen days and nineteen nights,  
 Of sun, or moon, or midnight stern,  
 Auld Durie never saw a blink,  
 The lodging was sae dark and dern.
- “ He thought the warlocks o’ the rosy cross  
 Had fang’d him in their nets sae fast;  
 Or that the gypsies’ glamour’d gang  
 Had lair’d his learning at the last.
- “ ‘ Hey! Botty lad! far yaud! far yaud!’  
 These were the morning sounds heard he;  
 And ever ‘ Alack!’ auld Durie cried;  
 ‘ The deil is hounding his tykes on me!’
- “ And whiles a voice on Baudrons cried,  
 With sounds uncouth and sharp and hie,  
 ‘ I have tar-barrell’d mony a witch,  
 But now, I think, they’ll clear scores wi’ me!’
- “ The king has caused a bill be wrote,  
 And he has set it on the Tron:—  
 ‘ He that will bring Lord Durie back  
 Shall have five hundred merks and one.’
- “ Traquair has written a privie letter,  
 And ho has seal’d it wi’ his seal;  
 ‘ Ye may let the auld brock out o’ the poke;  
 The land’s my ain, and a’s gane weel.’
- “ O, Will has mounted his bonny black,  
 And to the tower of Greæme did trudge;  
 And once again, on his sturdy back,  
 Has he hente up the weary judge.
- “ He brought him to the council stairs,  
 And there full loudly shouted he,  
 ‘ Gie me my guerdon, my sovereign liege,  
 And take ye back your auld Durie!’ ”

From the minstrelsy of the border naturally grew the “Lay of the Last Minstrel,”—the first of Scott’s important poems, with which his career of prolific and prosperous authorship began. It is a poem which was due, like “Cowper’s Task,” to a woman’s suggestion. I am very

much disposed to rank it first in merit as well as time of Scott's poetical productions. Certainly it at once presented the prominent traits of his character as a poet. "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," "Marmion," and the "Lady of the Lake," all won a speedy and wide popularity. There was an animation about them which gave to all readers delight; but after a while it began to be discovered that it was a pleasure not to be sustained at its first elevation: the poems did not bear that repeated and repeated reperusal which the highest order of poetry always admits of. Then people were begging back the fame they had given with such open hand.

This makes it necessary to judge more carefully of the real character of Scott's poetry. Certainly it has no pretensions to be classed with the greatest productions of the art. Admirable as were his powers, he did not possess that sage and meditative imagination—the rare endowment of "the vision and the faculty divine"—which alone constitutes the inspiration of the greatest poets. But, having taken the true measure of his own strength, that which he attempted he achieved; and his poems have set him beyond the reach of rivalry as the descriptive bard of a period of history and legend rich in adventure and romance. They are full of the martial spirit which was a predominant passion with him; and to no one could be more aptly appropriated the lines of a bard of ancient Greece,—

If the glory of their days,  
Their strength of arm, their steely war,  
Be the chosen theme, of praise,  
Let any score a leap for me afar;  
And he shall see  
With what a lightsome knee  
My bounding sinew springs:  
The mighty eagle beats his wings,  
And, lo! he is beyond the sea.

The character of Walter Scott's poetry admits of a very specific and express statement. Its chief merit lies in its power of description and narrative. Beyond this it does not pass into the region of the deep passions of human nature. He is the descriptive poet of the manners and society of some former ages. Numerous passages of the most vivid description might be cited. One may be mentioned,—as fine a piece of descriptive poetry of its kind as could be found in the whole range of poetry:—the night-ride of William of Deloraine to Melrose Abbey, in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel." It is something of a risk to break the continued flow of the passage; but I must venture one or two fragments of it:—

" Unchallenged thence, past Deloraine  
 To ancient Riddel's fair domain,  
 Where Aill, from mountains freed,  
 Down from the lakes did raving come,  
 Each wave was erested with tawny foam  
 Like the mane of a chestrnut steed.  
 In vain ; no torrent deep or broad  
 Might bar the bold moss-trooper's road ;  
 At the first plunge the horse sunk low,  
 And the water broke o'er the saddle-bow ;  
 Above the foaming tide, I ween,  
 Searee half the charger's neck was seen,  
 For he was barded from counter to tail,  
 And the rider was arm'd complete in mail ;  
 Never heavier man and horse  
 Stemm'd a midnight torrent's force.  
 The warrior's very plume, I say,  
 Was daggled by the dashing spray ;  
 Yet, through good heart and our Ladye's grace,  
 At length he gain'd the landing-place "

The midnight opening of the grave of the wizard, Michael Scott, is given with fine effect :—

" Full many a scuteheon and banner riven  
 Shook to the eold night-wind of heaven,  
 Around the sereenéd altar's pale ;  
 And there the dying lamps did burn  
 Before thy low and lonely urn,  
 O gallant chief of Otterburne,  
 And thine, dark Knight of Liddesdale !  
 O, fading honours of the dead !  
 O, high ambition lowly laid !  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 An iron bar the warrior took,  
 And the monk made a sign with his wither'd hand  
 The grave's huge portal to expand.  
 With beating heart to the task he went ;  
 His sinewy frame, o'er the gravestone bent,  
 With bar of iron heaved amain,  
 Till the toil-drops fell from his brow like rain.  
 It was by dint of passing strength  
 That he moved the massy stone at length.  
 I would you had been there to see  
 How the light broke forth so gloriously,  
 Stream'd upward to the ehaneel roof,  
 And, through the galleries, far aloof,  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 And, issuing from the tomb,



Show'd the monk's cowl and visage pale,  
Danced on the dark-brow'd warrior's mail,

And kiss'd his waving plume.  
Before their eyes the wizard lay  
As if he had not been dead a day.

\* \* \* \*

'Now, speed thee what thou hast to do,  
Or, warrior, we may dearly rue;  
For those thou mayest not look upon  
Are gathering fast round the yawning stone!  
Then Deloraine, in terror, took  
From the cold hand the mighty book,  
With iron clasp'd and with iron bound;  
He thought, as he took it, the dead man frown'd:  
But the glare of the sepulchral light  
Perchance had dazzled the warrior's sight."

The escape of the soldier from the supernatural spot into the fresh morning air fitly closes the description:—

"The knight breath'd free in the morning wind,  
And strove his hardihood to find.  
He was glad when he pass'd the tombstones grey  
Which girdled round the fair Abbaye!

\* \* \* \*

Full fain was he when the dawn of day  
Began to brighten Cheviot grey;  
He joy'd to see the cheerful light,  
And he said Ave Mary as well as he might."

Scott's second poem showed another influence at work upon his mind. Although just entering manhood when Europe was startled by the outbreak of the French Revolution, he appears not to have been much affected by that great convulsion. With the times that succeeded it was widely different.

The mighty military genius of Buonaparte was sweeping in every direction with the swiftness of a destroying wind. In every quarter of Europe—to borrow a figurative illustration from a usage in times of danger in ancient Greece—might be seen on the walls of the towns the signal of torches waved in tumultuous consternation. It is an interesting fact in Scott's history that his authorship began when the military fervour was at its height. Napoleon's meditated invasion of Great Britain was stirring the latent energies of the nation. Among his own countrymen Scott saw the ancient martial spirit of their ancestors—the decline of which he had mourned over—reanimated, and, like the spectre of the elder Hamlet, bursting its cerements and starting from the tomb in arms. Edinburgh was converted into a camp; citizens of all classes

wore the military dress, and upwards of ten thousand volunteers were constantly under arms, and beacon-fires were kept in readiness along the coast and through the mountains. In all this Scott took a large and active part. The zeal with which he shared in the military movements of his countrymen suggested to him afterwards that spirited chapter at the close of "The Antiquary," describing the false alarm from the mistaken firing of one of the beacons. The notes added to that fine novel, after the lapse of many years, still manifest the same deep feelings in recording some interesting recollections of that agitating period:—

"Through the border counties the alarm spread with rapidity; and on no occasion, when that country was the scene of perpetual and unceasing war, was the summons to arms more rapidly obeyed. In Berwickshire, Roxburghshire, and Selkirkshire, the volunteers and militia got under arms with a degree of rapidity and alacrity which, considering the distance individuals lived from each other, had something in it very surprising: they poured to the alarm-posts on the sea-coast in a state so well armed and so completely appointed, with baggage, provisions, &c., as was accounted by the best military judges to render them fit for instant and effectual service. . . . Two members of the Selkirkshire yeomanry chanced to be absent from their homes and in Edinburgh on private business, when that corps made a remarkable march. The lately-married wife of one of these gentlemen, and the widowed mother of the other, sent the arms, uniforms, and chargers of the two troopers, that they might join their companions at Dalkeith. The author was very much struck by the answer made to him by the last-mentioned lady, when he paid her some compliment on the readiness which she showed in equipping her son with the means of meeting danger, when she might have left him a fair excuse for remaining absent. 'Sir,' she replied, with the spirit of a Roman matron, 'none can know better than you that my son is the only prop by which, since his father's death, our family is supported. But I would rather see him dead on that hearth than hear he had been a horse's length behind his companions in the defence of his king and country.' The writer mentions what was immediately under his own eye and within his own knowledge; but the spirit was universal, wherever the alarm reached, both in Scotland and England." \*

This was the period of the composition of "Marmion." Many of the most energetic descriptions were conceived while he was in quarters with the cavalry; and it was his delight, while composing, to walk his

\* Notes to "The Antiquary."

powerful steed up and down upon the Porto Bello sands, within the beating of the surge, and now and then plunging in his spurs, to go off as at the charge, with the spray dashing about him. This was the hot enthusiasm of a soldier-poet; and the fruit of it was the most stirring description of a battle that ever was realized by a poet's imagination to the imagination of his reader. The passage is too well known for me to quote from; but observe the admirable representation in these four or five lines of the approach of the Scottish army:—

“Nor martial shout nor minstrel tone  
Announced their march: their tread alone,  
At times one warning trumpet blown,  
At times a stifled hum,  
Told England, from his mountain-throne  
King James did rushing come!”

But the single stroke of description which, more than any other, shows Scott's mastery in this department of poetry, is that vivid appeal to the imagination in the first intimation of Marmion's fate. As a matter of fact, nothing is told of him; as a matter of imagination, everything is told in the lines,—

“Fast as shaft can fly,  
Bloodshot his eyes, his nostrils spread,  
The loose rein dangling from his head,  
Housing and saddle bloody red,  
Lord Marmion's steed rush'd by.”

In noticing the martial tone of Scott's poetry, I am reminded of a tribute paid to one of his poems which is one of the finest acknowledgments on record to the power of verse. When the “Lady of the Lake” was published, Scott's friend, Captain Adam Ferguson, was serving in the Peninsular War. When a copy of the poem reached him, he was posted on a point of ground somewhere on the lines of Torres Vedras, exposed to the enemy's artillery. “The men were ordered to lie prostrate on the ground. While they kept that attitude, the captain, kneeling at their head, read aloud the description of the battle in the sixth canto, and the listening soldiers interrupting him only by a joyous huzza whenever the French shot struck the banks close above them.”

Was ever poem recited under such circumstances?—enough of danger for pleasurable excitement, with enough of security for attention.

What a subject for the painter,—for Wilkie, for instance, a friend both of Scott and Ferguson, familiar, too, as he chanced to be, both with Scottish character and Spanish landscape. The Highlanders, not unused

to a minstrelsy, grouping around the reader, interchanging looks of sympathy and delight; the sturdy soldier easting off a tear, half angry at his inability to check the proverbial sympathy of a mountaineer at the mention of his distant home, the hills and the lakes of Scotland brought before him by the poet's question,—

“ Where shall he find, in foreign land,  
So lone a lake, so sweet a strand ? ”

Some one, perhaps, waving his arm at the same time with a half-uttered huzza, as the shot from the enemy's battery scatter the broken branches of the olive-tree over the group; others, more impetuous, starting from their recumbent posture as the array of Scottish standards is called up by these lines :—

“ Is it the thunder's solemn sound  
That mutters deep and dread ?  
Or echoes from the groaning ground  
The warrior's measured tread ?  
Is it the lightning's quivering glance  
That on the thicket streams ?  
Or do they flash on spear and lance  
The sun's retiring beams ?  
I see the dagger-crest of Mar,  
I see the Moray's silver star  
Wave o'er the cloud of Saxon war  
That up the lake comes winding far.  
To hero bound for battle-strife,  
Or bard of martial lay,  
'Twere worth ten years of peaceful life,—  
A glance at that array ! ”

After the “Lady of the Lake,” Scott found his popularity waning, and perhaps his poetic resources exhausted; for he was not a man to recognise a poet's solemn responsibility of cultivating his imagination by laborious meditation. The power he had employed with such brilliant success never left him. He was the minstrel still, even in his later years, when calamities weighed heavily upon him. On one occasion, amid his commercial difficulties, he chanced to be reading the historical account of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee's, leaving Edinburgh, in 1688, and making a last and dying effort to rally the Highlanders in support of the house of Stuart. It inspired the animated stanzas of “Bonny Dundee.” “I know not,” he wrote in his diary, “what could have induced me to take a frisk so uncommon of late as to write verses. I sup-

pose the same impulse that makes the birds sing after the storm is blown over."

"To the Lords of Convention 't was Claver'se who spoke :—  
 ' Ere the king's crown shall fall, there are crowns to be broke ;  
 So let each cavalier who loves honour and me,  
 Come follow the bonnet of bonny Dundee ! '

Come, fill up my cup ; come, fill up my can ;  
 Come, saddle your horses and call up your men ;  
 Come, open the west port and let me gang free,  
 And it 's room for the bonnets of bonny Dundee !

" Dundee he is mounted and rides up the street,  
 The bells are rung backwards, the drums they are beat,  
 But the provost, douce man, said ' Just e'en let him be ;  
 The gude town is well quit of that deil of Dundee ! '

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

" As he rode down the sanctified bends of the Bow,  
 Ilk carline was flying and shaking her pow ;  
 But the young plants of grace they look'd couthie and sleet,  
 Thinking ' Luck to thy bonnet, thou bonny Dundee ! '

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

" With sour-featured Whigs the Grass-market was cramm'd,  
 As if half the West had set tryst to be hang'd ;  
 There was spite in each look, there was fear in each ee,  
 As they watch'd for the bonnets of bonny Dundee !

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

" The cowls of Kilmarnock had spits and had spears,  
 And lang-hafted gullies to kill cavaliers ;  
 But they shrunk to close heads, and the causeway was free  
 At the toss of the bonnet of bonny Dundee !

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

" He spurr'd to the foot of the proud castle-rock,  
 And with the gay Gordon he gallantly spoke :—  
 ' Let Mons Meg and her marrows speak twa words or three,  
 For the love of the bonnet of bonny Dundee ! '

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

" The Gordon demands of him which way he goes ;  
 ' Where'er shall direct me the shade of Montrose !  
 Your Grace in short space shall hear tidings of me,  
 Or that low lies the bonnet of bonny Dundee !

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

" ' There are hills beyond Pentland, and lands beyond Forth ;  
 If there 's lords in the Lowlands, there 's chiefs in the North :  
 There are wild Dunnies wassals three thousand times three  
 Will cry ' *hoigh* ' for the bonnets of bonny Dundee !

Come, fill up my cup, &c.



“ ‘There’s brass on the target of barken’d bull-hide ;  
 There’s steel in the scabbard that dangles beside ;  
 The brass shall be burnish’d, the steel shall flash free,  
 At a toss of the bonnet of bonny Dundee !

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

“ ‘Away to the hills, to the caves, to the rocks,  
 Ere I own a usurper I’ll couch with the fox :  
 And tremble, false Whigs, in the midst of your glee :  
 You have not seen the last of my bonnet and me !’

Come, fill up my cup, &c.

“ ‘He waved his proud hand, and the trumpets were blown,  
 The kettle-drums clash’d, and the horsemen rode on,  
 Till on Ravelston’s cliffs and on Clermiston’s lee  
 Died away the wild war-notes of bonny Dundee !

Come, fill up my cup ; come, fill up my can ;  
 Come, saddle the horses ; come, call up the men ;  
 Come, open your gates, and let me go free,  
 For it’s up with the bonnet of bonny Dundee !’

It is curious to observe how, when beneath their enormous load Scott’s mind began to fail, his memory elung to the ancient minstrelsy, although it lost its hold of some of his own compositions. On hearing the verses from “The Pirate,” set to music,—

“ ‘Farewell ! farewell ! The voice you hear  
 Has left its last soft tone with you ;  
 Its next must join the seaward cheer,  
 And shout amoug the shouting crew !’—

he said, “Capital words ! Whose are they ? Byron’s, I suppose.” But, on visiting the ruined castle of Douglas, he repeated his favourite of the old ballads,—“The Battle of Otterburne ;” and the closing stanza left him in tears :—

“ ‘My wound is deep ; I fain would sleep ;  
 Take thou the vanguard of the three,  
 And hide me beneath the bracken-bush  
 That grows on yonder lily lee.’  
 This deed was done at the Otterburne  
 About the dawning of the day :  
 Earl Douglas was buried by the bracken-bush,  
 And the Percy led captive away.”

A more striking proof of the tenacity to the strains which had been familiarized to his ear in childhood occurred on his hopeless pilgrimage to Italy. There were pointed out to him the Lake of Avernus, the Temple of Apollo, the Lucrine Lake, Baiæ, Misenum, and the surrounding monuments : and what was the reply ? The fragment of a Jacobite ditty. “I found,” says his companion, “that something in the place

had inspired recollections of his own beloved country and the Stuarts ; for he immediately repeated, with a grave tone and with great emphasis,—

‘ Up the craggy mountain and down the mossy glen,  
We canna gang a milking for Charlie and his men.’

I could not help smiling at this strange commentary on my dissertation on the Lake of Avernus.”

There are many traits of Scott’s character as a man,—especially in his calamitous years,—many as a writer, the notice of which does not belong to this course of lectures. It is, however, not inappropriate that the existence of the last and the greatest of the Border Minstrels closed in the centre of that region which his genius has peopled with spiritual creations, and not far away from that spot where his young imagination was early fed with the traditions of Scottish song.



## LECTURE XII.

Coleridge.

ADVANTAGE OF CONNECTING CRITICAL WITH HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS—SPENSER AND HIS AGE—SPIRIT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION—CONTRAST BETWEEN THE AMERICAN AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONS—ITS INFLUENCE OVER THOUGHT AND ACTION—COLERIDGE'S "FRANCE"—NATURE OF LYRICAL POETRY—EARLY DEVELOPMENTS OF COLERIDGE'S GENIUS—HIS PHILOSOPHY—HIS CRITICAL PAPERS—HIS CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIS OWN POETICAL ENDOWMENT—HIS BOYHOOD AT CHRIST'S CHURCH HOSPITAL—MONODY ON CHATTERTON—HIS LOVE OF NATURE—ODE ON DEJECTION—TRANSLATIONS OF SCHILLER'S TRAGEDIES—"THE ANCIENT MARINER"—"CHRISTABEL"—ITS METRICAL BEAUTY—HIS EPITAPH.

IN tracing the progress of English poetry from its early eras, I have sought in this course of lectures so to connect critical with historical considerations as to give, I trust, some assistance in forming an idea of the intellectual and moral altitude of each of the illustrious poets whose characters we have been contemplating. This has been attempted under a conviction that it was part of the duty which is resting upon me; for I regarded the process as well nigh essential to a true appreciation of the genius of the poets. How, for instance, could there be a just, or at least an adequate, sense of the glory of that matchless allegory, "The Fairy Queen," if the student were not drawn to some knowledge of the age in which Spenser flourished?—if I may apply such a word to a life closing early and in neglect and sorrow. Extraaneous as history is to literature, it is the framework which is important to give due effect to the portraiture of men who have earned distinction in the annals of letters. It is thus that the proportions and colours are better realized. Fancy, for one moment, some one perusing the wonderful poem just alluded to,—that majestic fragment of Spenser's imagination; fancy it read with some confused and false notion that it was a production of the times of Charles II.,—that detested and opprobrious period of English history, which all the language of loathing I could heap upon it was not strong enough to stigmatize: and what a feeling of incongruity would come over the reader as he found himself following the spotless moral poet through the limitless land of Fairy! The poet, thus ignorantly misplaced, would seem as if he had alighted upon the wrong planet.

But when you appropriate Spenser to his own age,—that thoughtful and adventurous age, philosophical and chivalrous, of whose representative men it might be said, as it was said of one of them, that they were so contemplative you could not believe them active, and so active you could not believe them contemplative :—place the poet, I say, in that age, and how true, how natural, is his position, and what a light is reflected on the character of his inspirations ! Or, again, how almost inexplicable would be the production of the “Paradise Lost” in a generation unworthy of it, did we not consider the mighty ordeal through which Milton’s mind had been passing in the times of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate ! and how inadequately would the reader judge of the poetry of Pope, did he not remember the characteristics of those times, an age peculiarly of wits and freethinkers ! Poetic inspiration is, indeed, one light, for it is light derived from heaven ; but, like the starlight, it has its many magnitudes, its various phases in the cloudless ether or in the haze of the horizon.

“ The stars preëminent in magnitude,  
And they that from the zenith dart their beams,  
Visible though they be to half the earth,  
Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness,  
Are yet of no diviner origin,  
No purer essence, than the one that burns  
Like an untended watch-fire on the ridge  
Of some dark mountain, or than those which seem  
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,  
Among the branches of the leafless trees :  
All are the undying offspring of one Sire.”

It has been my aim to show the poetry of each age shining in its own region of time and its own atmosphere ; but, on bringing the course down to what may be considered contemporary literature, there is less occasion for historical illustration. One influence, however, requires to be noticed. I refer to the general agitation of Europe consequent to the French Revolution. The closing years of the last century were years of change. Things which had endured for ages were perishing, not by slow gradations of decay, but by quick and unlooked-for violence. Time-honoured institutions were not suffered to attain the limit of their natural existence and then to sink under the gradual accumulation of years, but were swiftly swept away by a new force. The clenched hand of prescriptive tyranny was forced to quit its grasp ; and, more than that, if it had been the fond traditional belief of other generations that

“ Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king,”—

it was found that the outpoured blood from the severed neck of an anointed king could wash the balm from off his brow. The people in one of the central monarchies of Europe had suddenly started up, and, casting away respect to grey-haired prerogative, boldly questioned the authority of the power which so long had trampled on them. Men began to ask why the bounties of heaven should be accumulated, reserved, and wasted for the bloated and ingrate luxury of the few, while the many were pining, hungry and heart-stricken. The sympathies of Christendom were enlisted: the pulse of other nations began to beat quicker. The French Revolution assumed the aspect of a general European revolution. Ancient opinions and rules of life were abandoned, and new modes of thought and feeling began to predominate. The political revolution became an intellectual and moral one; for so entire was the subversion of old institutions, that in reconstructing society men were of necessity led to speculate on its very elements and on the principles and destiny of human nature,—speculations which, from a revolutionary forsaking of the old paths, unhappily fostered a self-sufficient and faithless philosophy. And here let me notice where seems to me to lie the important difference between the French Revolution and the great British and American Revolutions, besides the difference in the genius and temperament of the two nations. In the latter the struggle was to vindicate and secure old principles; to guard the Constitution; not to manufacture new schemes of government; to save the good old cause, as it was styled. In the American Revolution, for instance, the war was in truth a mighty constitutional dispute. It was a question of law; and the claim of our fathers was simply for old British rights,—rights as ancient as the Great Charter; and it was this that made them so strong, so consistent, so indomitable. They were seeking nothing new—at first, not even independence, which was not aspired to till it became an indispensable means for the security of their end,—civic freedom. Indeed, the mother-country had thrust her children away from her, and, ridding herself of a parent's responsibility, had given them many of the privileges of manhood. When afterwards she wished to call them back again to her lap, they were too stout to come there, and they claimed to be British *men*, entitled to ancient British rights. The Revolution was characterized by the composure of men acting with a consciousness of having the right with them. How free from all excess and licentiousness! how pure, in the memory of after-times, alike from reproach and regret! It was a strife actuated and impregnated with a spirit of magnanimity,—a sense of duty and law—of religious responsibility. I speak of the American Revolution only for the sake of the contrast with that of France, which



was much more stimulant to the minds of men, and, consequently, to literature. The French Revolution was no contest of the Constitution or of law, for both were swept away, and everything was to be remodelled,—in fact, made anew. New creeds of liberty were taught, new doctrines of the rights of man; the human heart was anatomized; Christianity, with its blessed day of sanctity and rest, sacred from the creation, was banished to make way for a sensual, brutalizing philosophy, with its tenth-day Sabbaths and its idolatry of human reason. Theories of ecclesiastical, political, and social regeneration were propagated with apostolic zeal to all lands,—doctrines which cast a cloud on the glittering spire of every village church, which made the husbandman tremble in the tenure of his little property of a few acres,—a patrimony, perhaps, and an ancient homestead from one generation after another,—and which struck dismay where the domestic virtues were grouped at the once secure and happy fireside. It was a commotion of the very primal elements of society. The scene was a new one—suddenly a new one—in the drama of civilization: the power of strange rights was thrust into the hands of men; the weight of strange duties was harnessed on their backs. Ancient landmarks covered with the moss of a long tract of years were torn up; and thus it became necessary alike for those who hailed and those who abhorred the change to acquaint themselves with the power, the will, and the destiny of man. The guidance of principles, drawn not from any customary or conventional authority of constitution or law, but from the depths of human nature, was needed. Men, long accustomed to float on the placid waters of a river within sight and reach of safe and smiling shores, found themselves suddenly driven out upon a stormy and shoreless sea; and in their peril some were earnestly gazing for a beacon-light from the lost shore, some were idly gazing at the flashing fires which crest the dark billows of the deep, and a few were looking upward hopefully for a heaven-lit ray from some star in the elouded sky. To express myself less imaginatively, the agitation of the French Revolution forced men, whether the political and social changes were congenial to them or not, into deeper moods of thought and further-reaching sentiments. Absolute authority had lost its sufficiency. With so wide-spread a spirit of freedom, too often miserably degenerating into licentiousness, superficial precepts, whether in government, philosophy, or literature, were not enough. The influence, either direct or indirect, of that convulsion was far extended over all departments of thought and action. No such agency is to be attributed to the American Revolution, which was achieved so much less tumultuously, so much more happily—more lastingly. There was no such turmoil, such

heaving of the very earth by the agitation of the deep-seated elements of government and of society. It was comparatively a tranquil process, for it was a revolution that always kept the law on its side. Observe the different effect of the two revolutions upon a mind like Burke's. When the British colonial contest arose, it called from him his statesmanly speeches on taxation and conciliation ; but these were only parliamentary arguments upon questions of the Constitution and law and policy. When the French Revolution came on, a discussion more profound was demanded ; and Burke, feeling that the crisis called for something more than even a statesman's argument, gave to the world his celebrated "Reflections," which are the expressions of philosophy scanning the fundamental principles of political society, the texture of social life, and the universal elements of human nature.

I have dwelt on this subject much more than I intended, and more perhaps than even the discursive character of lectures will quite justify, because I have been often impressed with the thought that there are few topics of more vital interest to the American mind than to understand and appreciate the essential differences between the American and French Revolutions. There is a moral gulf between them as wide as the Atlantic, as might be shown on a fitting occasion. My present purpose, however, is with the Revolution of France, and with it an account of its influence on European literature, and especially on English poetry. I have been reminded of this influence on approaching the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Upon his genius it was powerful ; for, hoping impetuously of human nature, he was an enthusiast in the cause of freedom. It was by the intense interest and impassioned zeal thus inspired that his powers were chiefly called into action. In dedicating some of his poems to his brother, he recalls the time

"When with joy of hope thou gav'st thine ear  
To my wild firstling lays. Since then my song,  
Hath sounded deeper notes, such as becom  
Or that sad wisdom folly leaves behind,  
Or such as, tuned to these tumultuous times,  
Cope with the tempest's swell !

These various strains,  
Which I have framed in many a various mood,  
Accept, my brother ! and (for some perchance  
Will strike discordant on thy milder mind),  
If aught of error or intemperate truth  
Should meet thine ear, think thou that riper age  
Will calm it down, and let thy love forgive it ! "

Coleridge's enthusiasm in the promise of the French Revolution was

in no way hurtful to the moral tone of his genius. Miserably as the hope was frustrated, when tyranny and cruelty were busy in disguise and the word "revolution" began to acquire a fearful meaning, the poet's spirit repudiated the adulterous cause, but cherished with as strong a fervour the love of freedom. These feelings form the theme of one of his odes,—that entitled "France," which is said to have been pronounced by Shelley the finest English ode of modern times. This opinion is rather too strong a one; but certainly the finest specimens of the higher order of English lyrical poetry have been produced by the poets of our own times. I know of none to be mentioned in the same range of the same department of poetry, unless it be Milton's "Ode on the Nativity," and some of the odes of Collins and Gray. Under the title of lyrical poetry are included the song, the ballad, the elegy, the hymn, and, above all, the ode, which especially calls for the poet's power and his temperament, with the best mastery over the metrical music of the language and knowledge of the subtle laws of harmony. It was lyrical poetry which, as the name indicates, was once considered that species of verse composed with an adaptation to musical accompaniments. It was well said by Charles Lamb that Milton almost requires a solemn service of music to be played before you enter upon him. But he brings his music, to which who listens had need bring docile thoughts and purged ears. The observation has recurred to my mind in turning to the subject of lyrical poetry; for it seems to me that, in reading any great ode, something of the preparation that music gives to the imagination and feelings is wanted to set us in right tune, as it were, for the articulate cadences. There is no more varied metrical construction than that which the true lyrical poets adopt as the fit expression for the ebb and flow of the imaginative passion. This ode of Coleridge's embodies in a true poetic shape the best emotions inspired by those momentous years of European history. The lofty opening invocation of the elements, the first flush of enthusiasm for the French cause, the sorrow for England's adversity to it, the clinging to the cause in spite of the first misgivings, the recantation and the plea for forgiveness when the cause proved an unworthy one, France assailing freedom in her ancient mountain-home of Switzerland, and the fine close of the ode, closing, as it began, by rising above the strife of nations and the falsehood of mankind to the tokens of liberty in the elements, the "guide of homeless winds and playmate of the waves,"—all these passages go far to sustain the high eulogy pronounced by Shelley.

"Ye clouds" that far above me float and pause,  
Whose pathless march no mortal may control!

Ye ocean waves ! that, wheresoe'er ye roll,  
 Yield homage only to eternal laws !  
 Ye woods ! that listen to the night-birds' singing,  
 Midway the smooth and perilous slope reclined,  
 Save when your own imperious branches, swinging,  
 Have made a solemn music of the wind !  
 Where, like a man beloved of God,  
 Through glooms which never woodman trod,  
     How oft, pursuing fancies holy,  
 My moonlight way o'er flowering weeds I wound,  
     Inspired beyond the guess of folly  
 By each rude shape and wild unconquerable sound !  
 O ye loud waves ! and O ye forests high !  
 And O ye clouds that far above me soar'd !  
 Thou rising sun ! Thou blue rejoicing sky !  
 Yea, everything that is and will be free !  
 Bear witness for me, wheresoe'er ye be,  
 With what deep worship I have still adored  
     The spirit of divinest Liberty.

“ When France in wrath her giant limbs uprear'd,  
 And with that oath, which smote air, earth, and sea,  
 Stamp'd her strong foot, and said she would be free,  
 Bear witness for me how I hoped and fear'd,  
 With what a joy my lofty gratulation  
 Unawed I sang, amid a slavish band ;  
 And when, to whelm the disenchanted nation,  
 Like fiends embattled by a wizard's wand,  
     The monarchs march'd in evil day,  
     And Britain join'd the dire array,  
 Though dear her shores and circling ocean,  
 Though many friendships, many youthful loves,  
     Had sworn the patriot emotion,  
 And flung a magic light o'er all her hills and groves,  
 Yet still my voice, unalter'd, sang defeat  
 To all that braved the tyrant-quelling lance,  
 And shame too long delay'd and vain retreat !  
 For ne'er, O Liberty, with partial aim  
 I dimm'd thy light, or damp'd thy holy flame,  
 But bless'd the pæans of deliver'd France,  
 And hung my head, and wept, at Britain's name.

“ ‘ And what,’ I said, ‘ though Blasphemy's loud scream  
 With that sweet music of deliverance strove ?  
 Though all the fierce and drunken passions wove  
 A dance more wild than e'er was maniac's dream ?  
 Ye storms, that round the dawning east assembled,  
 The sun was rising, though he hid his light ! ’

And when, to soothe my soul, that hoped and trembled,  
 The dissouancee ceased, and all seem'd ealm and bright.—  
 When France her frount, deep-searr'd and gory,  
 Conceal'd with elustering wreaths of glory,—  
     When, insupportably advancing,  
 Her arm made moekery of the warrior's tramp,—  
 While, timid looks of fury glancing,  
 Domestic treason, crush'd beueath her fatal stamp,  
 Writhed like a wounded dragon in his gore,—  
 Then I reproach'd my fears that would not flee;  
 'And soon,' I said, 'shall Wisdom teach her lore  
 In the low huts of them that toil and groan,  
 And, conquering by her happiness alone,  
 Shall France compel the nations to be free,  
 Till Love and Joy look round and call the earth their own'

"Forgive me, Freedom! Oh, forgive those dreams!  
 I hear thy voice; I hear thy loud lament  
 From bleak Helvetia's icy cavern sent;  
 I hear thy groans upon her blood-stain'd streams  
 Heroes that for your peaceful country perish'd,  
 And ye that fleeing spot your mountain-snows  
 With bleeding wounds, forgive me, that I cherish'd  
 One thought that ever bless'd your cruel foes!  
     To scatter rage and traitorous guilt  
 Where Peace her jealous home had built;  
     A patriot race to disinherit  
 Of all that made their stormy wilds so dear,  
     And with inexpiable spirit  
 To taint the bloodless freedom of the mountaineer.  
 O France, that moekest heaven, adulterous, blind,  
 And patriot only in pernicious toils,  
 Are these thy boasts, Champion of human kind?—  
 To mix with Kings in the low lust of sway,  
 Yell in the hunt and share the murderous prey?  
 To insult the shrine of Liberty with spoils  
 From freemen torn? to tempt and to betray?

"The sensual and the dark rebel in vain,  
 Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game  
 They burst their manacles, and wear the name  
 Of Freedom graven on a heavier chain!  
 O Liberty! With profitless endeavour  
 Have I pursued thee many a weary hour;  
 But thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever  
 Didst breathe thy soul in forms of human power,  
 Alike from all, howe'er they praise thee  
 (Not prayer nor boastful name delays thee),



Alike from Priestcraft's harpy minions  
 And factious Blasphemy's obscene slaves  
 Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions,  
 The guide of homeless winds and playmates of the waves.

"And there I felt thee ! on that sea-cliff's verge  
 Whose pines, scarce travell'd by the breeze above,  
 Had made one murmur with the distant surge !  
 Yes ! while I stood and gazed, my temples bare,  
 And shot my being through earth, sea, and air,  
 Possessing all things with intensest love,  
 O Liberty, my spirit felt thee there."

In considering the literary influences of the French Revolution, and the expression of feelings awakened at the time, I have passed over the earlier development of Coleridge's genius. If ever mortal could be said to have been endowed supereminently with genius as distinguished from talents, it was that frail though pure and tender-hearted, aspiring, wayward being, the poet, the philosopher, Coleridge. He is one of the poets who, like Milton and Cowper and Southey, are honourably known also by their prose writings. Indeed, it will probably be to the philosophical works of Coleridge that a deeper gratitude will be due than to his poetry, while whatever popular fame may attach to his memory will be the acquisition of his poems. One spirit, indeed, pervades all his productions; one intellectual character is stamped upon them all, only modified by the subjects. The great moral element of his genius was a perpetual thirsting after truth,—ideal truth. The most striking traits of his intellectual character are imaginative powers of wonderful originality combined with habits of profound meditation. These powers were unhappily under the government of only an undisciplined will, and the movements of his mind were fitful, wayward, and incomplete. His wisdom is scattered in fragments, in recollections of his eloquent discourse, and often in notes written on the margins of books; and from these various quarters it has been gleaned by the dutiful and affectionate hands of his disciples. His life was afflicted with almost life-long disease, the wretchedness of which first drove him to a remedy which soon multiplied many-fold his burdens, a suicidal use of opium,—a long-continued habit, at last, however, conquered; and it has been said by those who best knew him, that his long and passionate struggles and final victory over this infirmity are among the brightest as well as most interesting traits of the moral and religious being of this humble, this exalted Christian. In his personal career he enjoyed as little of worldly prosperity as he possessed little of worldly wisdom; but it resembled poor Cowper's course of life in this:—that one kind friend was raised

up after another affectionately to shelter and cherish a man who, with all his grasp of intellect, with all his tenderness of feeling, was sadly unfitted for many of the responsibilities of life. When he placed himself, in the almost-despairing hope of breaking his opium habits, under the care of a physician, being received an inmate in his family, this connection, beginning in little more than a professional visit, lasted for near twenty years,—in fact, during the remainder of his life; for he spent the rest of his years under the roof of his magnanimous friend, his medical adviser. The great purpose to which he conceived that the faculties of his mind were dedicated was his philosophy, an end always in his view, and in his hopes always reached after but never attained,—the reconciliation of philosophy with Christian religion. It was one of his last regrets that his life and strength were not spared to him to complete his philosophy. “For,” said he, “as God hears me, the originating, continuing, and sustaining wish and design in my heart was to exalt the glory of his name; and, which is the same thing in other words, to promote the improvement of mankind.” It is not for me now, even if I possessed the ability, to dwell upon the philosophical writings of Coleridge; and I pass from them, therefore, with this one remark:—that when I recall the many passages adorned with rich and verdant imagery, their enthusiastic, and, as it were, triumphant eloquence, mighty not only in self-communion and a profound reverence for God’s written word, but in the long-sustained flow of his sonorous sentences, and all consecrated to the cause of Christianity, thoughts and images and words come across the spirit, not as if from one man, but rather like the waving of the palm-branches and the many-toned voice of an adoring multitude.

The prose writings of Coleridge which are more appropriate for me to allude to before resuming the consideration of his poetical character are his critical papers. I know of no English writer who has given his thoughts to the criticism of imaginative literature, combining so much ability to the task. It is in the spirit of poetry that poetry must be criticised; the might of imagination and its laws are best realized and expounded by imagination itself: indeed, the perfect enjoyment of poetry arises only where there is an active sympathy between the imagination of the poet and the reader. It is the dearth of imaginative energy that makes so much of criticism mere lifeless disquisition. When the poets fall into the guardianship of some unimaginative, fancyless critic, he sets them before you like so many caged birds, their eyes dimmed with the loss of their native freedom, and wings drooping or beating against their bars, or even like the stuffed dead forms in glass cases, instead of pointing to the imagination of the poet resting on some lofty

perch that nature gives, or "soaring the air," winging its flight athwart the blue sky, "as full of gladness and as free of heaven," and thus a portion of the poet's own vision is caught, and, the beholder's

"Senses gradually wrapt  
In a half sleep, he'll dream of better worlds,  
And dreaming hear thee still, O singing lark,  
That singest like an angel in the clouds."

To the arduous work of poetical criticism Coleridge brought a mind at once poetical and philosophical,—all the original instincts of poetry, creative power with an exquisite sense of the rhythm of language, and deep reflection on the principles of the art. The best criticism on Shakspeare is that which Coleridge has left; for he "had," as has been well said, "for understanding the great dramatist the two powers which are scarcely less mighty in our intellectual than in our moral and spiritual life,—faith and love:—a boundless faith in Shakspeare's truth, and a love for him akin to that with which philosophers study the works of nature, shrinking from no labour for the sake of getting at a satisfactory solution, and always distrusting themselves until they have found one, in a firm confidence that wisdom will infallibly be justified of her children." There is a passage of his prose—a very high-wrought piece of fancy—in which Coleridge expresses his modest consciousness of his own poetical endowment, and his reverential homage to those whose imagination he contemplated as bearing them on higher and longer-sustained flights. It is a singularly imaginative piece of prose composition, and very characteristic of the author:—

"I have too clearly before me the idea of a poet's genius to deem myself other than a very humble poet; but, in the very possession of the idea, I know myself so far a poet as to feel assured that I can understand and interpret a poem in the spirit of poetry and with a poet's spirit. Like the ostrich, I cannot fly; yet I have wings that give me the feeling of flight, and, as I sweep along the plain, can look up towards the bird of Jove, and can follow him and say, 'Sovereign of the air, who descendest on thy nest in the cleft of the inaccessible rock, who makest the mountain-pinnacle thy perch and halting-place, and, scanning with steady eye the orb of glory right above thee, imprintest thy lordly talons in the stainless snows that shoot back and scatter round his glittering shafts, I pay thee homage. Thou art my king. I give honour due to the vulture, the falcon, and all thy noble baronage; and no less to the lowly bird, the skylark, whom thou permittest to visit thy court and chant her matin song within its cloudy curtains: yea, the linnet, the thrush, the swallow, are my brethren. But still I am a bird, though

but a bird of the earth. Monarch of our kind, I am a bird even as thou ; and I have shed plumes which have added beauty to the beautiful and grace to terror, waving over the maiden's brow and on the helmed head of the warrior chief ; and majesty to grief, drooping o'er the car of death ! ”

The juvenile poems of Coleridge were remarkably prophetic of his future powers. In fact, his whole character was typified in his youth : the child was indeed the father of the man. The wild imagination, the mastery over metrical melody, the thoughtfulness, the magic powers of discourse, all were there. His schoolmate and lifelong friend, Charles Lamb, recalling the days spent many years before in that famous London school, the noble foundation of good King Edward VI., thus apostrophizes the “inspired charity-boy.” “Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Logician, Metaphysician, Bard :—how often have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration to hear thee unfold in thy deep and sweet intonations the mysteries of Iamblicus or Plotinus, or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar, while the walls of the old Grey-Friars’ echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy*.” The day-dreams that filled so large a portion of the visionary Coleridge’s existence,—they too began in early life. The story is told of him when quite a child, going down the Strand (a crowded London thoroughfare), he was very earnestly thrusting his hands out, so as to come in contact with a person walking before him, who seized him and accused him of an attempt to pick his pocket. The little dreamer sobbed out his protestations of innocence, and, to the astonishment of the bystanders, explained how he thought himself Leander swimming across the Hellespont.

I may cite an instance of the early force of Coleridge’s imagination from his monody on the death of Chatterton. The wondrous career of that young poet, and the melancholy close of it by suicide in boyhood, were then fresh recollections. Nature had beautifully endowed him, and the world by a wicked harshness extinguished all light in a spirit already darkened with somewhat of the gloom of hereditary insanity. This earth was no home for him ; and it is a fine stroke of imagination when Coleridge associates the chance knell from any distant steeple with the mother-voice of nature calling back the young and earth-hapless poet.

“ Oh, what a wonder seems the fear of death,  
 Seeing how gladly we all sink to sleep,  
 Babes, children, youths, and men,  
 Night following night, for threescore years and ten.



But doubly strange where life is but a breath  
To sigh and pant with up Want's rugged steep.

\* \* \* \*

"Lo! by the grave I stand of one for whom  
A prodigal nature and a niggard doom  
(*That* all bestowing, *this* withholding all)  
Made each chance knell, from distant spire or dome,  
Sound like a seeking mother's anxious call:—  
Return, poor child! home, weary truant, home!"

When Coleridge's genius was developing itself, he avowed a high admiration and gratitude to a poet somewhat his senior, though still surviving him,—one whose reputation has never been a general one, the poet Bowles,—perhaps chiefly known by his controversy with Lord Byron on the subject of the poetry of Pope. Coleridge's admiration of Bowles's poems is not to be accounted for by any of that intensity of imagination which was eminently his own characteristic, but because he found in them something more real, more true and manly, than in most of the poetry then in fashion,—a combination of natural thoughts with natural diction. I can digress from my main subjects no longer than to give one short specimen of Bowles's poetry,—what strikes me as a well-told recollection of childhood, and what all who have experienced it will recognise as truly recording the impression made on the imagination on the occasion of a first approach to the ocean:—

"I was a child when first I heard the sound  
Of the Great Sea. 'T was night, and, journeying far,  
We were belated on our road, 'mid scenes  
New and unknown,—a mother and her child,  
Now first in this wide world a wanderer.  
My father came, the pastor of the church  
That crowns the high hill-crest above the sea;—  
When, as the wheels went slow and the still night  
Came down, a low, uncertain sound was heard,  
Not like the wind. 'Listen!' my mother said,  
'*It is the sea! Listen! it is the sea!*'  
My head was resting on her lap; I woke;  
I heard the sound, and closer prest her side.  
Much of the sea, in tearful wonderment,  
I oft had heard, and of the shipwreck'd man  
Who sees, on some lone isle, day after day,  
The sun sink o'er the solitude of waves,  
Like *Crusoe*; and the tears would start afresh,  
Whene'er my mother kiss'd my hair and told  
The story of that desolate wild man,  
And how the talking bird, when he return'd,



After long absence, to his forlorn cave,  
Spoke as in tones of human sympathy,  
'*Poor Robin Crusoe,*'

Thoughts like these arose  
When first I heard at night the distant sound,  
*Old ocean, of thy everlasting voice !*"

There are no passages of Coleridge's poetry in which the peculiar traits of his genius are more distinct than those of a descriptive cast. He shared that which belongs to all poetic minds,—a genuine and unaffected love of nature. In the lines of one of his poems,—

"I know  
That nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure.  
No plot so narrow, be but nature there,  
No waste so vacant, but may well employ  
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart  
Awake to love and beauty !"

But the predominant habit of his genius was self-communion, *in*-looking rather than *out*-looking, so wrapt in meditation as perhaps often to preclude that open submissive susceptibility to impressions from the outward world of sense. This, however, led him finely to proclaim that great tenet of the poetic creed, that the influences of inanimate nature are dependent on the shaping faculty of imagination :—

"That outward forms the loftiest still receive  
Their finer influences from the life within."

Unhappily, Coleridge did not steadily possess that genial mood of imagination by which the poet's song

"Should make all nature lovelier, and itself  
Be loved like nature.

He tells of this very unhappiness—this morbid torpor of the imagination—in some of the stanzas in his ode on "Dejection :"—

"A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,  
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion'd grief,  
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief  
In word, or sigh, or tear.  
O lady, in this wan and heartless mood,  
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,  
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,  
Have I been gazing on the western sky  
And its peculiar tint of yellow green.  
And still I gaze ; and with how blank an eye !  
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,  
That give away their motion to the stars ;

Those stars, that glide behind them or between,  
 Now sparkling, now bedimm'd, but always seen ;  
 Yon crescent moon, as fix'd as if it grew  
 In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue ;  
 I see them all so excellently fair ;  
 I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

“ My genial spirits fail ;  
 And what can these avail  
 To lift the smothering weight from off my breast ?  
 It were a vain endeavour,  
 Though I should gaze for ever  
 On that green light that lingers in the west.  
 I may not hope from outward forms to win  
 The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.”

In another strain of the same ode the important imaginative truth is set forth :—

“ From the soul itself must issue forth  
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
 Enveloping the earth.  
 And from the soul itself must there be sent  
 A sweet and potent voice of its own birth,  
 Of all sweet sounds the life and element.”

When Coleridge's poetry gives forth

“ This light, this glory, this fair, luminous mist,  
 This beautiful and beauty-making power,”—

the purport of his descriptions is to discover “religious musings in the forms of nature.” “Let me,” he exclaims in an admirable passage of his prose, “digress for a few moments from the written word to another book, likewise a revelation of God,—the great book of his servant nature. That in its obvious sense and literal interpretation it declares the being and attributes of the Almighty Father none but the fool in heart has ever dared gainsay. But it has been the music of gentle and pious minds in all ages ; it is the poetry of all human nature, to read it likewise in a figurative sense, and to find therein correspondencies and symbols of the spiritual world.” This disposition to consider the perishable material world as the shadow of an eternal spiritual reality is sublimely expressed in one of his poems, with an allusion perhaps to Plato's hypothesis of the cave wherein we are placed with our backs to the light and behold reflections in its arch :—

“ What is freedom but the unfetter'd use  
 Of all the powers which God for use had given ?  
 But chiefly this, him first, him last to view

Through meaner powers and secondary things  
Effulgent, as through clouds that veil his blaze.  
For all that meets the bodily sense I deem  
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet  
For infant minds ; and we in the low world  
Placed with our backs to bright reality,  
That we may learn with young unwounded ken  
The substance from its shadow."

I pass by Coleridge's dramatic poems and his remarkable translations of Schiller's tragedies—remarkable as perhaps the only versions of which it was ever said that the translation was even superior to the original—and proceed to the two poems which are most characteristic of the poet's genius, and on which his poetic fame chiefly rests,—“The Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel.” These extraordinary poems—neither of them of any great length—are the highest proofs of the originality of Coleridge's imagination. Their origin is traced by him to some conversations with Wordsworth, turning, as he describes them, on the two cardinal points of poetry,—the power of exciting the sympathy of a reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colour of imagination. The sudden charm which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunset diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature. The thought suggested itself that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life, in the other, the incidents and agents were to be supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in interesting the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. The supernatural fell to the share of Coleridge; and his endeavour, he tells us, was to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for the shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. This has been accomplished with wonderful skill. Both the poems are essentially, absolutely, imaginative. They are pure originals. They are extraordinary manifestations of the magic power of imagination in blending together the natural and supernatural,—spectral creations with emotions of common humanity. They are the work of a wild and wondrous witchery. The veil is rent asunder which separates the mortal bodily life from the ghostly immaterial life of phantoms,—the world of sense from the world of spirit. The argument of the “Ancient

Mariner" was originally set forth in these few words :—how a ship, having first sailed to the equator, was then driven by storms to the cold country towards the South Pole ; how the ancient mariner cruelly and in contempt of the laws of hospitality killed a sea-bird ; and how he was followed by many and strange judgments, and in what manner he came back to his own country.

" It is an ancient mariner ;  
And he stoppeth one of three :—  
' By thy long gray beard and glittering eye,  
Now, wherefore stopp'st thou me ? ' "

It is a wedding guest that he holds by the fascination of his eye. The seafaring man's escape from supernatural dangers has left him the victim of a mysterious and woeful agony, to be calmed only by travelling from land to land and recounting his fearful adventures :—

" Since then, at an uncertain hour  
That agony returns,  
And till my ghastly tale is told  
This heart within me burns.  
I pass, like night, from land to land ;  
I have strange power of speech.  
That moment that his face I see,  
I know the man that must hear me :  
To him my tale I teach."

This narrative opens with the ship passing out from the placid atmosphere of actual life, losing sight of the church-steeple, of the highlands, and of the light-house. Quickly struck by the storm-blast, it is borne far away to the south and entangled among islands of ice and the accumulated snow of the polar latitudes. In the desperate danger there comes an albatross, that huge bird of the Southern seas : it is hailed as a bird of good omen, and a way is found to steer the ship through the ice. The bird follows, alighting on mast or shroud and fed by the grateful crew, but in a wicked and luckless moment is killed by the ancient mariner. His shipmates become parties to his guilt, for, with a fickle superstition, they ascribe their ill-luck to the bird, and justify the wanton death of one of God's mute creatures. The mysterious vengeance begins with the misery of a dead realm beneath a torrid sky :—

" The fair breeze blew ; the white foam flew  
The furrow follow'd free :  
We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.

- “ Down dropp’d the breeze ; the sails dropp’d down ;  
     ’T was sad as sad could be :  
 And we did speak only to break  
     The silence of the sea !
- “ All in a hot and copper sky  
     The bloody sun at noon  
 Right up above the mast did stand,  
     No bigger than the moon.
- “ Day after day, day after day,  
     We stuck : nor breath, nor motion :—  
 As idle as a painted ship  
     Upon a painted ocean.
- “ Water, water, everywhere,  
     And all the boards did shrink ;  
 Water, water, everywhere,  
     Nor any drop to drink.”

The ship lies becalmed a weary time, and the crew have dark assurances in their dreams that invisible fiends are pursuing and plaguing them. At length, afar off, between them and the sun, there is beheld a something in the sky, seen at first, as a little speck, then a mist, and then the strange skeleton-shape of a spectral bark. As it nears them, hideous figures are discerned upon the deck, and frightful voices and noises are sounding across the waters of the sluggish sea. It vanishes ; but death has struck the crew of the becalmed ship, and the ancient mariner alone is left in the central solitude of a motionless ocean, with dismal hauntings of remorse and the memory of supernatural terrors, and with the open-eyed dead lying in groups around his feet :—

- “ The stars were dim, and thick the night ;  
 The steersman’s face by his lamp gleam’d white ;  
     \*                      \*                      \*                      \*
- “ One after one, by the star-dogg’d moon,  
     Too quick for groan or sigh,  
 Each turn’d his face with a ghastly pang  
     And cursed me with his eye !  
     \*                      \*                      \*                      \*
- “ Alone, alone,—all, all alone,—  
     Alone on a wide, wide sea ;  
 And never a saint took pity on  
     My soul in agony !
- “ The many men, so beautiful !  
     And they all dead did lie ;  
 And a thousand thousand slimy things  
     Lived on ; and so did I !



- “ I look'd upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away ;  
I look'd upon the rotting deck,  
And there the dead men lay !
- “ I look'd to heaven, and tried to pray,  
But, or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wickèd whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust !
- “ I elosed my lids and kept them close,  
And the balls like pulses beat ;  
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,  
Lay like a load on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet.
- “ The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
Nor rot nor reek did they ;  
The look with which they look'd on me  
Had never pass'd away.
- “ An orphan's curse would drag to hell  
A spirit from on high ;  
But, oh ! more horrible than that  
Is the curse in a dead man's eye.  
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
And yet I could not die ! ”

In his loneliness and wretchedness and perpetual wakefulness, the ancient mariner's heart, touched by a skyey influence, yearneth towards the tranquil motions of the heavenly bodies :

- “ The moving moon went up the sky,  
And nowhere did abide ;  
Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside.”

He looks beyond the enchanted shadow of the ship, and beholds the bright creatures of the deep ; and, as the wanton murder of the bird had brought the mysterious affliction upon himself and his companions, the spell begins to break when there springs in his heart a sudden sympathy with the happiness of the animals floating in his sight ; and when from his lips breaks a blessing upon them,—

- “ O happy living things ! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare.  
A spring of love gush'd from my heart,  
And I bless'd them unaware.  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I bless'd them unaware :  
“ The selfsame moment I could pray ! ”

The utterance of prayer brings to the mariner's wasted spirit the blessing of sleep, rain upon the parched planks of the ship, and the help of a troop of angelic spirits, which, incarnated in the dead bodies of the crew, man the ship. Wild commotions and strange sights fill the sky and the elements, and soft spiritual music and voices soothe the lone human being into a trance. When that is abated, the penance is renewed for a brief space ; but the curse is at last expiated :—

“I woke, and we were sailing on  
As in a gentle weather :  
'T was night, calm night ; the moon was high :  
The dead men stood together !

“All stood together on the deck  
For a charnel-dungeon fitter ;  
All fix'd on me their stony eyes,  
That in the moon did glitter.

“The pang, the curse, with which they died,  
Had never pass'd away :  
I could not draw my eyes from theirs,  
Nor turn them up to pray.

“And now this spell was snapt : once more  
I view'd the ocean green,  
And look'd far forth, yet little saw  
Of what had else been seen.

“Like one that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And, having once turn'd round, walks on  
And turns no more his head ;  
Because he knows a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.

“But soon there breathed a wind on me,  
Nor sound nor motion made :  
Its path was not upon the sea,  
In ripple or in shade.

“It raised my hair ; it fann'd my cheek  
Like a meadow-gale of spring :  
It mingled strangely with my fears ;  
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

“Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship ;  
Yet she sail'd softly too.  
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze ;  
On me alone it blew.”

The wild voyage, haunted by fiends and blessed by good angels, is drawing to a close. There dawns upon the mariner's eye the light-house

top, the hill, and the church,—happy visions of his native land ! At the same time he looks to the lifeless bodies which had risen up to do the service of the ship, and, lo ! the angelic spirits are leaving them, and the last guardian act is the waving of their seraph-hands across the waters of the calm harbour-bay, as signals to the pilot and to the hermit who dwells in the wood on the seashore, thus giving the mariner over to the care of his fellow human beings :—

“ Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat ;  
 And, by the holy rood !  
 A man all light, a seraph-man,  
 On every corse there stood.

“ This seraph-band, each waved his hand :  
 It was a heavenly sight ;  
 They stood as signals to the land,  
 Each one a lovely light.

“ This seraph-band, each waved his hand :  
 No voice did they impart,—  
 No voice ; but, oh ! the silence sank  
 Like music on my heart.”

The poem of “Christabel” is a more pleasing production than the “Ancient Mariner.” There is less wildness of imagination, though quite as high an effect of it. It has more of human interest, presenting, however, the same remarkable combination of the natural and supernatural. It is a story of witchcraft, but not the witchcraft of ugly hags like the weird-sisters in *Macbeth*, but the magic power of a beautiful sorceress. It is a story of the alliance of the strength of goodness and prayer with the guardianship of the sainted dead, potent against the demoniac power of evil. The heroine, Christabel, is as lovely a creation as ever poet’s imagination formed. Orphaned of her mother, the pride and sole prop of her aged father, the betrothed of a knightly lover,—gentle, innocent, pious, and beautiful,—she is the fairest victim witchcraft ever struck at. It must also be noticed that the poem is one of the most remarkable specimens of versification in the language, and shows Coleridge’s great powers in that important branch of his art. To the eye it has the appearance of very irregular verse ; to the ear and to the feelings no such effect is produced, for the variations it presents accord with some transitions of the imagery or the passion, and the rhythm throughout may be said to be faultless. The poem was recognised as a perfect specimen of musical versification by Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, and imitated by them both. It was the acknowledged model of metre of the “Lay of the Last Minstrel.”

The scene of “Christabel” is laid in an ancient baronial castle, at

midnight, when the only sounds are the hootings of the owls and the howling of the old mastiff, answering the striking of the clock :—

“ Is the night chilly and dark ?  
 The night is chilly, but not dark ;  
 The thin gray cloud is spread on high ;  
 It covers but not hides the sky.  
 The moon is behind, and at the full,  
 And yet she looks both small and dull ;  
 The night is chill, the cloud is gray ;  
 ’T is a month before the month of May,  
 And the spring comes slowly up this way.

“ The lovely lady, Christabel,  
 Whom her father loves so well,  
 What makes her in the woods so late,  
 A furlong from the castle-gate ?  
 She had dreams all yesternight  
 Of her own betrothed knight,  
 And she in the midnight wood will pray  
 For the weal of her lover that ’s far away.

“ She stole along ; she nothing spoke ;  
 The sighs she heaved were soft and low,  
 And nought was green upon the oak  
 But moss and rarest misletoe :  
 She kneels beneath the huge oak-tree,  
 And in silence prayeth she.  
 The lady sprang up suddenly,  
 The lovely lady, Christabel ;  
 It moan’d as near as near can be,  
 And what it is she cannot tell ;  
 On the other side it seems to be  
 Of the huge, broad-breasted old oak-tree.

“ The night is chill, the forest bare ;  
 Is it the wind that moaneth bleak ?  
 There is not wind enough in the air  
 To move away the ringlet-curl  
 From the lovely lady’s cheek ;  
 There is not wind enough to twirl  
 The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
 That danees as often as dance it can,  
 Hanging so light, and hanging so high,  
 On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

“ Hush, beating heart of Christabel !  
 Jesu, Maria, shield her well.  
 She folded her arms beneath her cloak,  
 And stole to the other side of the oak :  
 What sees she there ? ”

While the innocent Christabel is thinking her prayers from the depths of her pure and loving heart, the witch is close by, in the shape of a woman richly clad and exceedingly beautiful. She asks for pity on her distress, telling that her name is Geraldine, and giving a deceitful story. The tender heart of Christabel is touched, and she bids the witch welcome to share her couch with her. The supernatural thickens as they enter into the castle, and the victim is getting entangled in the meshes of sorcery. According to the popular superstition, the witch sinks, as if in sudden pain, at the threshold, and is lifted over by Christabel, who devoutly proposes a thanksgiving for their safety; but the evil spirit eludes it:—

“ ‘ Alas, alas ! ’ said Geraldine ;  
 ‘ I cannot speak for weariness. ’ ”

As they move along, the sleeping mastiff utters an angry moan, and the dying embers on the hearth dart forth a tongue of flame, while a beautiful relief is given to the supernatural by an impulse of simple nature, in Christabel’s tender thoughtfulness for her aged parent :—

“ They pass’d the hall, that echoes still  
 Pass as lightly as you will !  
 The brands were flat ; the brands were dying,  
 Amid their own white ashes lying ;  
 But when the lady pass’d, there came  
 A tongue of light, a fit of flame,  
 And Christabel saw the lady’s eye,  
 And nothing else saw she thereby,  
 Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,  
 Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.  
 ‘ Oh, softly tread,’ said Christabel ;  
 ‘ My father seldom sleepeth well. ’ ”

Christabel speaks, too, of her departed mother, when, lo ! at her child’s fond and innocent wish, echoed mysteriously by the witch, the guardian spirit of the mother is at hand, invisible except to the spectral sight of the sorceress ; and a conflict ensues between the good and evil spirits :—

“ ‘ O mother dear ! that thou wert here ! ’  
 ‘ I would,’ said Geraldine, ‘ she were ! ’  
 But soon with alter’d voice said she,  
 ‘ Off, wandering mother ! Peak and pine !  
 I have power to bid thee flee.’  
 Alas ! what ails poor Geraldine ?  
 Why stares she with unsettled eye ?  
 Can she the bodiless dead espy ?



And why with hollow voice cries she,  
 ' Off, woman ! off ! this hour is mine,  
 Though thou her guardian spirit be ;  
 Off, woman ! off ! 't is given to me ! '

" Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,  
 And raised to heaven her eyes so blue,  
 ' Alas ! ' said she, ' this ghastly ride,  
 Dear lady ! it hath wilder'd you.'  
 The lady wiped her moist, cold brow,  
 And faintly said, ' 'T is over now ! ' "

The power of witchcraft goes on increasing. Geraldine's silken robe falls ; and, beautiful and stately lady as she shone before, there is now disclosed to the heart-stricken Christabel an untold sight of some hidden, hideous deformity, some superhuman stump, such as could only belong to a witch's body. The poor maiden sinks into a trance, and her power of speech is sealed up by the incantation that is uttered over her by the demon drawing close to her side :—

" In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell  
 Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel."

I cannot trace the story of the poem without too much impairing the effect, and shall therefore only notice one or two passages in the remainder of it. The most striking of these is the apostrophe to the friends, and the sublimest image of a broken friendship to be found in the whole range of poetry :—

" Alas, they had been friends in youth ;  
 But whispering tongues can poison truth,  
 And constancy lives in realms above,  
 And life is thorny, and youth is vain :  
 And to be wroth with one we love  
 Doth work like madness in the brain.  
 And thus it chanced, as I divine,  
 With Roland and Sir Leoline.  
 Each spake words of high disdain  
 And insult to his heart's best brother ;  
 They parted, ne'er to meet again !  
 But never either found another  
 To free the hollow heart from paining.  
 They stood aloof, the scars remaining,  
 Like cliffs which had been rent asunder ;  
 A dreary sea now flows between.  
 But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,  
 Shall wholly do away, I ween,  
 The marks of that which once hath been."

The admirable skill in the versification of the poem, and its exact adaptation to the spirit of different passages, may be shown by observing, in contrast with any of the passages I have recited, the sound of the spirited lines containing the command given by the knight to one of his retainers :—

“ Bard Bracy, bard Braey ! your horses are fleet ;  
 Ye must ride up the hall, your music so sweet,  
 More loud than your horses’ echoing feet !  
 And loud and loud to Lord Roland eall,  
 ‘ Thy daughter is safe in Langdale Hall !  
 Thy beautiful daughter is safe and free :  
 Sir Leoline greets thee thus through me.  
 He bids thee come without delay,  
 With all thy numerous array,  
 And take thy lovely daughter home ;  
 And he will meet thee on the way,  
 With all his numerous array,  
 White with their panting palfreys’ foam.’ ”

The bard then narrates a dream which had distressed his sleep, in which he had seen a beautiful bird—the pet dove of the castle—fascinated in the forest by a serpent, and fluttering and writhing in its toils. The dream needs no interpretation for either Geraldine or the spell-bound Christabel. When the witch hears it, she stealthily turns a look of withering fascination on her mute victim. The shrinking up of her eyes, and the large dilating of them when she assumes an air of innocence, are given with great power, as well as the effect on Christabel, who passively imitates the serpent-look that had appalled her :—

“ A snake’s small eye blinks dull and shy,  
 And the lady’s eyes they shrunk in her head ;  
 Each shrunk up to a serpent’s eye,  
 And with somewhat of malice and more of dread.  
 At Christabel she looked askance ;  
 One moment—and the sight was fled !  
 But Christabel in dizzy trance,  
 Stumbling on the unsteady ground,  
 Shudder’d aloud with a hissing sound ;  
 And Geraldine again turn’d round,  
 And, like a thing that sought relief,  
 Full of wonder and full of grief,  
 She roll’d her large bright eyes divine  
 Wildly on Sir Leoline.

“ The maid, alas ! her thoughts are gone ;  
 She nothing sees,—no sight but one !

The maid devoid of guile and sin,  
 I know not how, in fearful wise,  
 So deeply had she drunken in  
 That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,  
 That all her features were resign'd  
 To this sole image in her mind ;  
 And passively did imitate  
 That look of dull and treacherous hate !  
 And thus she stood in dizzy trance,  
 Still picturing that look askance,  
 With forced unconscious sympathy,  
 Full before her father's view,—  
 As far as such a look could be  
 In eyes so innocent and blue !  
 And when the trance was o'er, the maid  
 Paused a while, and inly pray'd ;  
 Then, falling at the baron's feet,—  
 ' By my mother's soul do I entreat  
 That thou this woman send away ! '  
 She said : and more she could not say ;  
 For what she knew she could not tell,  
 O'er-master'd by the mighty spell."

It is that description of the serpent-look of the witch's eyes which, on being read in a company at Lord Byron's, is said to have caused Shelley to faint.

The poem of "Christabel" is a fragment. It was so left by the poet. Other writers have aspired to complete it, but their imitations have proved adventures as vain as presumptuous. Coleridge himself meditated its completion ; but, like other of his poems, it was a work of to-morrow—and to-morrow—and to-morrow. And his petty pace of life crept away without it.

In my lecture on Burns, I quoted to you the stanzas which the peasant-poet in fancy appropriated as the epitaph for his own tomb. It was an admonition to the living, and a touching plea for a little charity to the memory of the poor inhabitant below. The deeply-meditative imagination of Coleridge was busy too in taking the measure of an unmade grave, and dictated his own epitaph. His mind had roamed through the vast regions of human learning, and trod the highest places of speculative philosophy ; his imagination had taken the boldest and most limitless flights ; but this late effusion of his genius—probably his last verses—has its best beauty in its simplicity and its perfect Christian humility. The initials will be recognised as his customary designation of his name :—

“ Stop, Christian passer-by ! Stop, child of God,  
And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod  
A poet lies, or that which once seem'd he.  
Oh, lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C.,  
That he who many a year, with toil of breath,  
Found death in life, may here find life in death !  
Mercy for praise—to be forgiven for fame—  
He ask'd and hoped, through Christ. Do thou the same.”



## LECTURE XIII.

Southey.

(WITH NOTICE OF CHARLES LAMB.)

CHARLES LAMB, THE FRIEND OF COLERIDGE AND SOUTHEY—"THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES"—"ELIA"—ROBERT SOUTHEY—CHARACTER OF HIS PROSE—HIS COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS—HIS MENTAL DERANGEMENT—PERSONAL INTEREST OF HIS POEMS—SATIRICAL POWER—"WAT TYLER"—"JOAN OF ARC"—THE PRODUCT OF IMAGINATION IS OFTEN TRUTH—"MADOC"—"RODERIC"—"THALABA"—"THE CURSE OF KEHAMA"—SCRIPTURAL CHARACTER OF "THALABA"—KEBLE'S "CHRISTIAN YEAR"—STORY OF "THALABA AND ONEIZA"—SOUTHEY'S ODES—"THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW"—"THE TALE OF PARAGUAY"—HIS PLAYFUL POETRY—ODE ON THE PORTRAIT OF BISHOP HEBER.

IN the last lecture it was my intention to give a few words, at the close, to an author whom I wished to notice briefly; but I became entangled in the witchery of "Christabel," and the glittering eye of "the Ancient Mariner" held me too long to let me accomplish my purpose. It was a life-long friend of Coleridge's I was anxious to speak of; and I must find room for him now, before proceeding to the chief subject of the present lecture. Let me, therefore, present Charles Lamb between his two friends Coleridge and Southey. His intimacy with Coleridge began within the venerable precincts of Christ's Hospital, when they were blue-coat boys together in that time-honoured school. The friendship of boyhood, as is not usual, lasted into manhood and during life,—their minds, in many respects dissimilar, closely associated and identified. Coleridge died; and, in the brief interval of only a few months that Lamb survived, he was constantly reiterating, in a kind of soliloquy, and that confused state of feeling before we realize the absence in death of one whose presence has long been familiar,—he was reiterating, "Coleridge is dead! Coleridge is dead!" A poet who knew and loved them both has coupled their names in the same stanzas of his elegy on his brother-bards:—

"Nor has the rolling year twice measured  
From sign to sign its stedfast course,  
Since every mortal power of Coleridge  
Was frozen at its marvellous source.



“ The rapt one of the godlike forehead,  
 The heaven-eyed creature, sleeps in earth ;  
 And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,  
 Has vanish'd from his lonely hearth.

“ Like clouds that rake the mountain-summit,  
 Or waves that own no curbing hand,  
 How fast has brother follow'd brother  
 From sunshine to the sunless land ! ”

The early poetical pieces of Lamb were first published with Coleridge's; and it was Coleridge, he said, who first kindled in him, if not the power, yet the love, of poetry, and beauty, and kindliness. Poetry was gradually given up by them both. “ You,” said Lamb to his friend, now devoted to his philosophy, “ now write no ‘ Christabels ’ nor ‘ Ancient Mariners,’ and I have dwindled into prose and eritieism.” One of the most pleasing pieces in the small collection of Lamb's poems may illustrate both the depth and tenderness of his feelings and the peculiarity of his way of thought. The verses have the merit of giving currency to a very feeling phrase,—one of those happy combinations of words which poetry frequently incorporates into the language, serving to express some universal sentiment, and, therefore, soon acquiring the familiarity of a proverb. It cannot fail to be recognised, I think, as an expression of a feeling which has been experienced probably by every one who is now listening to me,—that painfully hollow sense of destitution when there comes across us the memory of faces familiar to some former period of life—that desolate craving after the departed,—the missing of something which had been a portion of our very selves. Several of the stanzas go on to mention the memory of what has been and never more will be, and in language as simple as possible,—just such words as the feeling would express itself in, finding natural utterance in earnest conversation; but, as it is dwelt on, suddenly the imagination expands, and, as the shadowy recollections of childhood—memories of the old familiar faces—throng around him, the living man, moved by a stronger sympathy with the past than with the present,—nearer of kin, as it were, to the dead than to the living,—feels spectre-like visiting the scenes of his childhood, and, in the intensity of his loneliness, the earth becomes a very desert to him. The allusion in the latter part of the verses is to Coleridge:—

“ I have had playmates, I have had companions,  
 In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days :  
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces !

- “ I have been laughing, I have been carousing,  
 Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies  
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces !
- “ I loved a love once, fairest among women ;  
 Closed are her doors on me ; I must not see her :  
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.
- “ I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man ;  
 Like an ingrate I left my friend abruptly,—  
 Left him to muse on the old familiar faces !
- “ Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood ;  
 Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,  
 Seeking to find the old familiar faces.
- “ Friend of my bosom ! thou more than a brother !  
 Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling ?  
 So might we talk of the old familiar faces !
- “ How some they have died, and how some they have left me,  
 And some are taken from me : all are departed :  
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces ! ”

There is another set of verses of Lamb's, which very gracefully and feelingly, and with admirable truth and a certain indescribable sort of playful pathos, express the emotion, not amounting to strong grief, occasioned by the death of one who had been pleasantly known, and the perplexity of mind in associating the lately living with the grave :—

- “ When maidens such as Hester die,  
 Their place ye may not well supply,  
 Though ye among a thousand try  
 With vain endeavour.
- “ A month or more hath she been dead ;  
 Yet cannot I by force be led  
 To think upon the wormy bed  
 And her together.
- “ A springy motion in her gait,  
 A rising step, did indicate  
 Of pride and joy no common rate  
 That flush'd her spirit.
- “ I know not by what name beside  
 I shall it call, if 't was not pride ;  
 It was a joy to that allied  
 She did inherit.
- “ Her parents held the Quaker rule,  
 Which doth the human feeling cool ;  
 But she was train'd in nature's school :  
 Nature had blest her.

“ A waking eye, a prying mind,  
 A heart that stirs, is hard to bind ;  
 A hawk’s keen sight ye cannot blind ;  
 Ye could not Hester.

“ My sprightly neighbour, gone before  
 To that unknown and silent shore,  
 Shall we not meet, as heretofore,  
 Some summer morning ?

“ When from thy cheerful eyes a ray  
 Hath struck a bliss upon the day,—  
 A bliss that would not go away,—  
 A sweet forewarning.”

The prose and criticism into which Lamb describes himself as having dwindled are those delightful essays which have given such a pleasant popularity to his assumed title of “Elia.” I know of no essay-writing comparable to them, so full are they of an inimitable blending of thoughtfulness and playfulness,—that half-serious, half-sportive habit of mind, far more agreeable than wit, described by our word,—without, I believe, any equivalent in other languages,—our English word, *humour*.

I pass now to a name of high worth in English literature,—the poet-laureate, Robert Southey. His life has been one of extraordinary literary industry,—a career of most honourable authorship, actuated by the most ardent impulses, and never lowered to the flattery of mean tastes or temporary fashions, but steadily devoted to the purpose of instructing, improving, and innocently pleasing his fellow-beings. I am not able to recall the name of any author who has accomplished so many, such varied, and such laborious literary plans. In prose he will be remembered as the historian of Brazil, of the Peninsular War, of the Church of England, as the biographer of Nelson, of Wesley, and of Cowper, and as the writer of various miscellaneous works and essays and translations. The excellence of his prose style is distinguished : such is its native purity and ease, that you may read page after page with scarce a thought of the transparent veil of words interposed between your mind and his. But my present duty is with his poetry alone.

Three or four years ago Mr. Southey, at the age of sixty-three, undertook what he regarded as a kind of testamentary task,—the collecting, arranging, and editing his complete poetical works. The task has been well fulfilled, with becoming modesty and an equally-becoming manly spirit of self-assurance. More than forty years had passed over some of the early poems ; and, with the memory of the distant days revived and the present thought of the approach of the

evening of his life, truly does he exclaim, "What is this task but to bring in review before me the dreams and aspirations of my youth, and the feelings whereto I had given that free utterance which by the usages of the world is permitted to us in poetry, and in poetry alone? Well may it be called a serious task thus to resuscitate the past. But, serious though it may be, it is not painful to one who knows that the end of his journey cannot be far distant, and by the blessing of God looks on its termination with sure and certain hope." The honourable ambition of occupying a permanent place in the literature not only of his own country, but of all lands where the English language is spoken, could not fail to animate the breast of one whose gratitude was as deep as Southey's to the wise and good of other ages who had bequeathed their recorded thoughts and inspirations. The strong and placid feelings of the true-hearted man of letters were never better told than by him :—

- " My days among the dead are past :  
 Around me I behold,  
 Where'er these casual eyes are cast,  
 The mighty minds of old ;  
 My never-failing friends are they,  
 With whom I converse day by day.
- " With them I take delight in weal,  
 And seek relief in woe ;  
 And, while I understand and feel  
 How much to them I owe,  
 My cheeks have often been bedew'd  
 With tears of thoughtful gratitude.
- " My thoughts are with the dead ; with them  
 I live in long-past years ;  
 Their virtues love, their faults condemn,  
 Partake their hopes and fears,  
 And from their lessons seek and find  
 Instruction with an humble mind.
- " My hopes are with the dead ; anon  
 My place with them will be ;  
 And I with them shall travel on  
 Through all futurity,  
 Yet leaving here a name, I trust,  
 That will not perish in the dust."

That trust will not be frustrated : the name of Southey will not perish in the dust, whatever elouds may have gathered round the evening of his days. If his strength has departed from him, it has not

been wasted by slothful neglect or by unworthy uses. A life of unwearied and unintermitted industry and of pure and honourable aim has been his ; he has done a giant's work in his generation ; and it is a very sad thing to think that now, when he has not quite reached the limit of his threescore years and ten, powers so well cultivated and so well employed should, by an inscrutable visitation, be impaired. I do not know of any piece of literary intelligence that has grieved me more than that the faculties of Southey's fine mind have been shattered.

“ What sight ean sorrow find  
Sad as the ruins of the human mind ? ”

The poetical fire inborn in Southey's heart began to make the motions of its first flames very early. Ardent in his feelings, and of a happy, buoyant temper, literary ambitions began very early to cross his mind. His passion for poetry happily took a fortunate and safe direction. At an age when it was thought the antiquated diction of the “ Fairy Queen ” must be unintelligible to him, he obtained a copy of that poem, on which his imagination at once fastened as most congenial ; and from that early day Spenser was the acknowledged master of his poetic life. The taste thus acquired was confirmed by the reading of Chaucer and Shakspeare and the old ballads, and the study of Homer and the Bible. He is well justified in adding, significantly, “ It was not likely to be corrupted afterwards.”

Southey's poetic impulses were strong in childhood, and the quickness of his apprehensions raised high and flattering hopes of his success in life, as he tells us in the lines on his miniature-picture taken in very early life :—

“ They augur'd happily  
That thou didst love each wild and wondrous tale  
Of fairy fiction, and thine infant tongue  
Lisp'd with delight the godlike deeds of Greeee  
And rising Rome ; therefore they deem'd, forsooth,  
That thou shouldst tread preferment's pleasant paths.  
Ill-judging ones ! They let thy little feet  
Stray in the pleasant paths of poesy,  
And when thou shouldst have prest amid the crowd,  
There didst thou love to linger out the day,  
Loitering beneath the laurel's barren shade.  
Spirit of Spenser, was the wanderer wrong ? ”

There is scattered throughout Southey's poetry much of that personal interest which is communicated when the poet employs his imagination to express his own individual thoughts and feelings, speaking in his own person, and not with the more purely-imaginative voice of his creations.



There is one of his smaller poems—a pleasing one, entitled the “Retrospect”—full of this kind of personal interest. It was suggested by a visit to the village of Corston, where he had spent some part of his boyhood, under the harsh tyranny of a boarding-school clouding the rightful gaiety of those blithe early years. The stern look and voice of his old teacher rise up to his memory, and the recollections of the dismal feelings of his entrance into the school :—

“ Even now, through many a long, long year, I trace  
The hour when first with awe I view’d his face ;  
Even now recall my entrance at the dome :  
’T was the first day I ever left my home !  
Years intervening have not worn away  
The deep remembrance of that wretched day.”

But what I chiefly notice this poem for is an expression of the fine satirical power which is a trait of Southey’s genius, well chastened, however, for it never tempted him into the indulgence of a vicious mockery. He is describing the interview between his parents and the proprietors of the school, and closes it with a significant allusion to the master’s short-lived civility to his pupil :—

“ Methinks ev’n now the interview I see,—  
The mistress’s glad smile, the master’s glee.  
Much of my future happiness they said,  
Much of the easy life the scholars led,  
Of spacious play-ground and of wholesome air,  
The best instruction and the tenderest care ;  
And when I follow’d to the garden door  
My father, till through tears I saw no more,  
How civilly they soothed my parting pain !  
And never did they speak so civilly again.”

Some sad feelings come over him, as after the lapse of some years he finds the spot the same, yet different, and the people estranged,—himself unknowing and unknown ; but, after yielding to a momentary depression, he bids his spirit rise to worthier feelings, and closes the poem with a self-admonition, which, considering it was an effusion of his early manhood, is a fine indication of that upright manliness which has honourably characterized Southey’s whole life :—

“ Thy path is plain and straight ; that light is given.  
Onward in faith, and leave the rest to Heaven.”

This deep, confiding spirit seems never to have deserted him. Living in one unbroken mood of faith, he carried forward with him as he grew older not only the buoyancy of boyish years, but a steadier cheerfulness, for ever brightening his own heart and his own home. In one of his

early pieces, conceived quite in the spirit of old George Herbert's poetical moralizing, and with somewhat of its sound, he touches very pleasingly on the moral discipline of his temperament :—

- “ O reader ! hast thou ever stood to see  
 The holly-tree ?  
 The eye that contemplates it well perceives  
 Its glossy leaves,  
 Order'd by an intelligence so wise  
 As might confound the atheist's sophistries.
- “ Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen,  
 Wrinkled and keen ;  
 No grazing cattle through their prickly round  
 Can reach to wound ;  
 But, as they grow where nothing is to fear,  
 Smooth and unarm'd the pointless leaves appear.
- “ I love to view these things with curious eyes,  
 And moralize ;  
 And in this wisdom of the holly-tree  
 Can emblems see  
 Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,—  
 One which may profit in the after-time.
- “ Thus, though abroad perchance I might appear  
 Harsh and austere,—  
 To those who on my leisure would intrude,  
 Reserved and rude,—  
 Gentle at home amid my friends I 'd be,  
 Like the high leaves upon the holly-tree.
- “ And should my youth (as youth is apt, I know)  
 Some harshness show,  
 All vain asperities I day by day  
 Would wear away,  
 Till the smooth temper of my age should be  
 Like the high leaves upon the holly-tree.
- “ And as, when all the summer trees are seen  
 So bright and green,  
 The holly-leaves a sober hue display  
 Less bright than they,—  
 But when the bare and wintry woods we see,  
 What then so cheerful as the holly-tree ?—
- “ So serious should my youth appear among  
 The thoughtless throng,  
 So would I seem, among the young and gay,  
 More grave than they ;  
 That in my age as cheerful I might be  
 As the green winter of the holly-tree.”

It is a part of the history of Southey's mind, that, as he describes it, in his youth, when his stock of knowledge consisted of such an acquaintance with Greek and Roman history as is acquired in the course of a regular scholastic education, when his heart was full of poetry and romance, and Lucan and Akenside were at his tongue's end, he fell into the political opinions which the French Revolution was then scattering throughout Europe; at that time, and with those opinions—or rather feelings—he wrote the dramatic piece entitled “Wat Tyler,” which was so often and so reproachfully coupled with his name. It was assailed on the floor of the House of Commons as seditious, and in various ways gained a notoriety remarkable in literary history for the crude production of a boy. Written hastily in three mornings, it was never given by the author himself to publication, till recently he has placed it in the collection of his works, just as it was first printed, when a stolen copy found its way to the press. It detracts nothing from the truth of Southey's pure and high-spirited review of his long literary career, when he records an author's best pride:—“In all that I have written, whether in prose or verse, there has never been a line, which, for any compunctious reason, living or dying, I could wish to blot.” “Wat Tyler” had been written under the influences of an enthusiasm which hoped that the immutable division of society into rich and poor might be abolished. The author had taken up revolutionary notions in his youth; conscientiously he wrote what he sincerely thought and felt; and when he outgrew them they were left behind and frankly disavowed, in the same straightforward and manly spirit.

Southey's young ardent genius was busy with poetical plans as well as with schemes of political and social regeneration. He was thus hurried into the execution of his early literary day-dreams when his powers should rather have been gradually maturing by such cautious development as the genius of his illustrious model, Spenser, had prescribed to itself. Southey first made himself known as a poet by a production in the fashion of an epic poem,—his “Joan of Arc,” the bold enterprise of a youth of nineteen years of age, and composed in the short space of six weeks. This poem, as Southey himself has since very candidly described it, crudely conceived, rapidly executed, rashly prefaced, and prematurely hurried to publication, was nevertheless favourably received,—a success which, with equal candour and good sense, he attributes chiefly to adventitious circumstances. It was a work of greater pretensions than had appeared for some time, and, being composed in somewhat of a political spirit, at a period of political excitement, attracted more attention and favour than usually fall to the share of

juvenile performances. Happily no one sooner discovered its deficiencies and faults than the young poet himself; and his vigorous good sense never suffered his early success to betray him into the fatal error of supposing that it gave him a dispensation from the careful cultivation of his natural endowment and the thoughtful study of the principles of his art. One single passage in the poem I wish briefly to notice, for the sake of a coincidence illustrative of the beauty-making power of imagination. The Maid of Orleans describes the death of a loved friend and playmate of her peasant-days, closing with these lines,—

“ I remember, as her bier  
Went to the grave, a lark sprung up aloft.  
And soared amid the sunshine, caroling  
So full of joy, that to the mourner's ear  
More mournfully than dirge or passing bell  
The joyous carol came, and made us feel  
That, of the multitude of beings, none  
But man was wretched.”

At the opening of this course of lectures I had occasion to speak of what I have often since sought to illustrate,—imaginative truth,—such truth as poetry makes manifest,—better, brighter, and purer than what we commonly see around us, and therefore designed to elevate and refine our thoughts and feelings. That the product of imagination is still truth is sometimes forced upon our conviction when actual life presents that which equals the poet's inventions. I have just referred to an incident which existed only in Southey's imagination,—the caroling of the lark over the grave of one of the imaginary beings in his early poem. At the burial of Mrs. Lockhart, the favourite child of Sir Walter Scott, precisely the same incident actually occurred,—the notes of the jocund lark heard in the air above the mournful company, and mingling with the sounds of the solemn services for the dead. That which had been seen and heard by the imaginative sense of one poet was now witnessed by the bodily senses of another. One had recorded an imagination; the other has recorded a fact; but does not every one feel that each is a record of truth, and hold unimportant that one is imaginative and the other actual? The officiating clergyman over Mrs. Lockhart's grave was that chaste and excellent poet—deserving more than this casual allusion—Milman. He has told, in some stanzas as true in feeling as in poetry, of the incident, when the “Minstrel's darling child” was placed in earth:—

“ O thou light-loving and melodious bird !  
At every sad and solemn fall  
Of mine own voice, each interval

In the soul-elevating prayer, I heard  
 Thy quivering descant full and clear,  
 Discord not inharmonious to the ear!  
 I watch'd thee lessening, lessening to the sight,  
 Still faint and fainter winnowing  
 The sunshine with thy dwindling wing,—  
 A speck, a movement in the ruffled light,—  
 Till thou wert melted in the sky,  
 An undistinguish'd part of the bright infinity.

“Meet emblem of that lightsome spirit thou!  
 That still, wherever it might come,  
 Sheds sunshine o'er that happy home,  
 Her task of kindness and gladness now,  
 Absolved with the element above,  
 Hath mingled, and become pure light, pure joy, pure love.”

To resume the poetry of Southey: his works are remarkable for including a greater number of elaborate poems than I remember in the volumes of any other of the English poets. “Joan of Arc,” “Madoc,” “Thalaba,” “The Curse of Kehama,” and “Roderic the Goth,” are the five extended poems which Southey completed amid all his multifarious literary work. His fame would perhaps have been greater had he written less; for the estimate of his poetical character is almost distracted by these numerous works of such variety and scope, and the occurrence of passages deficient in imaginative animation has depreciated the real value of other portions of his writings, distinguished for many of the highest qualities of poetry. The least interesting of his long poems seems to me to be the poem of “Madoc,” founded on the tradition of the early voyages of the Welsh to America; and its failure to win the sympathies of the reader would be very apt to discourage further acquaintance with Southey’s poetry. “Roderic” is a noble heroic narrative poem, founded on a grand historical period, the downfall of the Gothic monarchy in Spain, and filled with the lofty actors in that great national drama. It is a very spirited poem, the story conducted with all the interest of a romance, and not only abounding in passages both of beauty and sublimity, but finely sustained throughout. To resort to that very inadequate mode of illustrating the character of a poem, by giving isolated quotation, how true and how beautiful a description is in such a passage as this,—one of many like it:—

“The morn had risen o’ercast,  
 And, when the sun had reach’d the height of heaven,  
 Dimly his pale and beamless orb was seen  
 Moving through mist. A soft and gentle rain,



Scarce heavier than the summer's evening dew,  
 Descended,—through so still an atmosphere,  
 That every leaf upon the moveless trees  
 Was studded o'er with rain-drops, bright and full,  
 None falling, till, from its own weight o'erswoll'n,  
 The motion came."

One of the noblest passages (and it is one of true sublimity) is that in which Roderic, his royalty put off, disguised, and present in the priestly character, receives the vow pronounced by prince and people to the Lord of Hosts, upon the eve of war, and silently motions a blessing over the multitude :—

"Ne'er in his happiest hours had Roderic  
 With such commanding majesty dispensed  
 His princely gifts as dignified him now,  
 When with slow movement, solemnly upraised,  
 Towards the kneeling troop he spread his arms,  
 As if the expanded soul diffused itself,  
 And carried to all spirits, with the act,  
 Its effluent inspiration. Silently  
 The people knelt, and, when they rose, such awe  
 Held them in silence, that the eagle's cry,  
 Who far above them—at her highest flight,  
 A speck scarce visible—gyred round and round,  
 Was heard distinctly; and the mountain stream,  
 Which from the distant glen sent forth its sounds  
 Wafted upon the wind, grew audible  
 In that deep hush of feeling, like the voice  
 Of waters in the stillness of the night."

The most signal proof of the energy of Southey's imagination is the fact of his having, when a school-boy, conceived the design of exhibiting the most remarkable forms of mythology which have at any time obtained among mankind, by making each the groundwork of a narrative poem. The conception was a grand one, worthy of the strength and far-reaching vision of a mature imagination, and, if successfully executed, competent to enlarge the domains of poetry. It proved more than a dream of juvenile ambition; for he realized his plan in two important poems, founded on two of the mythologies,—that of the Arabs and of the Hindoos,—“Thalaba” and “The Curse of Kehama.” The wildest of these poems is that which has for its framework the religion of Hindostan,—the most monstrous, perhaps, of all false systems in its fables and in its rites. The highest efforts of Southey's genius were called forth by this Indian poem, “The Curse of Kehama;” and, while the extravagant fictions of the superstition are not suffered to

transcend his reach, and while the wonderful wildness and power of the work raise a mingled feeling of admiration and amazement, I find a perusal of the poem raises a sympathy with Charles Lamb's friendly criticism, when he said to Mr. Southey, "I confess the power of Kehama with trembling; but it puts me out of the pale of my old sympathies: my imagination goes sinking and floundering in the vast spaces of unopened-before systems and faiths."

The Arabian tale of "Thalaba" is, in this respect, different. It is not only an admirable poem, but one that lies within the range of our sympathies,—indeed a wild and wondrous song, but full of all emotions that have their home in every human heart. It is the finest achievement of what has been well styled Southey's judicious daring in the department of supernatural poetry. The one pervading moral of the poem is as pure and precious a one as the imagination of poet has ever glorified,—the war and victory of faith, the triumph over the world and evil powers. The imaginative lesson is conveyed through the types and forms of the Mahomedan religion purified and spiritualized; and it was on this point that an apprehension was entertained by the late Mr. Wilberforce that the poem conveyed a false impression of that religion, and that the moral sublimity which he admired in it was owing to that flattering misrepresentation. In this instance—as I am inclined to believe happens very often—that good man's imagination and feelings arrived at true conclusions; but, when he came to speculate and to criticize, his understanding misled him. With the moral sublimity of the poem he was impressed; nor is it possible that such impressions could have been attended for one instant with any misdirected feeling of admiration for a false religion. If the poem had the effect of misappropriating to a superstition that sentiment which is the rightful tribute to the faith of a true believer, an Israelite or a Christian, it would be as dangerous as delusive. But the truth takes no injury at the poet's hands. Indeed, "Thalaba" is one of the finest sacred poems in the language. It is not so much Mohammedanism on which it is founded, as something purified by the poet's imagination from the abominations of the false prophet,—a system such as we may conceive to have been developed under the covenant of Ishmael, a remnant of the patriarchal faith preserved by the pure and the faithful in Arabia. Instead, therefore, of discovering any reason for apprehension in the groundwork of "Thalaba," it is its glory that the poet has, by the might of imagination, spiritualized and Christianized Mohammedanism, much in the same way that Spenser hallowed the institution of chivalry, disfigured as it often was in actual life by martial and aristocratic

atrocities. Southey's poem is a splendid exhibition of faith,—its spiritual birth, its might, its trials, and its victory:—a portraiture none but a Christian poet could have conceived. Let the poem be read with the belief that such is the principle of it; and, as you follow the hero along his wondrous career to its sublime and pathetic close, the only feeling your rapt imagination will return will be a deep sense of the majestic strength given to the soul of man when God breathes into it the spirit of faith. Indeed I do not doubt that the imaginative impression is better than if the narrative of the poem had been taken from Scripture history,—a consideration demanding, however, more of argument for its development than I can now attempt. Let me only say that there seems to me much force in a remark of Mr. Southey's, in another connection, on the subject of poems or fictions founded on themes drawn from Scripture:—that when what is true is sacred, whatever may be added to it is so surely known to be false that it appears profane. A poem conceived and executed with so spiritual a purpose and so fanciful a form is, in truth, an illustration how pure a thing is the fire of genuine poetic inspiration, no matter what it touches. True to its nature, it is beyond the reach of contamination, shining like the sunlight upon the cathedral-roof or the church-spire, and not less brightly on mosque or minaret. The poem of "Thalaba" accomplishes its lofty design of elevating and adorning the reader's idea of faith; and what matters it that it reaches his imagination through the innocent superstitions of mythology? What object is there so harmless to the sun, as it moves along his path in the skies, and indeed so gloriously attendant upon him, as a sunlit cloud? The Christian believer will find nothing in this Arabian tale that can wound his sense of truth, and much that can fortify the spirit of faith. Let him not regret—let him rather rejoice—that poetry, Christian poetry, has shed its light, its glory, upon the harmless superstitions of the once faithful Arabia. It beams upon them like the angel's face upon the fugitive bondwoman, when he bade her turn her wandering footsteps home again, or when he spoke a blessing to her and the outcast Ishmael, opening a fountain to them in the desert. Admirable skill and taste are shown in the manner in which the poet causes a Bible strain to pass occasionally over the wild fancies of his Arabian story. This scriptural character is impressed upon the poem in the beautiful opening stanzas:

"How beautiful is night!  
A dewy freshness fills the silent air;  
No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,  
Breaks the serene of heaven.

In full-orb'd glory, yonder moon divine  
 Rolls through the dark blue depths.  
 Beneath her steady ray  
 The desert circle spreads,  
 Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky.  
 How beautiful is night !

“ Who, at this untimely hour,  
 Wanders o'er the desert sands ?  
 No station is in view,  
 Nor palm-grove, islanded amid the waste.  
 The mother and her child,  
 The widow'd mother and the fatherless boy,—  
 They, at this untimely hour,  
 Wander o'er the desert sands !

“ Alas ! the setting sun  
 Saw Zeinab in her bliss,—  
 Hodeirah's wife beloved.  
 Alas ! the wife beloved,  
 The fruitful mother late,  
 Whom, when the daughters of Arabia named,  
 They wish'd their lots like hers,—  
 She wanders o'er the desert sands  
 A wretched widow now :  
 The fruitful mother of so fair a race  
 With only one preserved,—  
 She wanders o'er the wilderness !

“ No tear relieved the burden of her heart ;  
 Stunn'd with the heavy woe, she felt like one  
 Half-waken'd from a midnight dream of blood.  
 But sometimes, when the boy  
 Would wet her hand with tears,  
 And, looking up to her fix'd countenance,  
 Sob out the name of ‘ mother ! ’ then she groan'd.  
 “ At length, collecting, Zeinab turn'd her eyes  
 To heaven, and praised the Lord.  
 ‘ He gave, he takes away ! ’  
 The pious sufferer cried :  
 ‘ The Lord our God is good.’

“ She cast her eyes around ;  
 Alas ! no tents were there  
 Beside the bending sands ;  
 No palm-tree rose to spot the wilderness ;  
 The dark blue sky closed round,  
 And rested like a dome  
 Upon the circling waste.

She cast her eyes around :  
 Famine and thirst were there  
 And then the wretched mother bow'd her head,  
 And wept upon her child ! ”

In vindicating the poem of “Thalaba” from a misapprehension respecting the impression caused by its Arabian framework, I have sought to show that poetry—Christian poetry—has the power of resewing fictions and superstitions from the realms of error, and bringing them into the alliance of truth. This leads to a further reflection, which I deem of sufficient importance to justify me in proceeding to it. It is that to Christianity belongs the privilege of appropriating to itself—of taking possession of—whatever is noble and grand and beautiful in the poetry of even paganism. This is the vantage-ground of our faith ; and, standing there, the Christian imagination may look over all the earth,—over all time,—and, wherever it discovers a sublime aspiration rising from the human soul, even though that soul be not blessed with the light of revelation, it may make that aspiration its own. Broken tones of truth come to us from the odes of Pindar, and from the Greek tragedies, and from the dark allusions in Roman poems to the Sibylline prophecies ; and when they strike upon the ear of Faith, they are tuned and harmonized to some celestial melody, and the discords of error mingled with them are lost in the air. It is thus the poetry of the heathen is given to us for an inheritance. All that is good and beautiful in it is part of the perfect truth of a true religion. This subject has been finely treated by the imagination of a living poet,—the Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford. It is the theme of one of the poems in Keble’s “Christian Year.” Faith made the jewels of the Egyptians its own ; it made the fertile land of the Canaanites its own ; and it has the power to make its own the imaginative wealth of heathendom,—the rich domain of classic poetry :—

“ See Lucifer like lightning fall,  
 Dash’d from his throne of pride ;  
 While, answering thy victorious call,  
 The saints his spoils divide,—  
 This world of thine, by him usurp’d too long,  
 Now opening all her stores to heal thy servants’ wrong.

“ So, when the first-born of thy foes  
 Dead in the darkness lay,—  
 When thy redeem’d at midnight rose  
 And cast their bonds away,—  
 The orphan’d realm threw wide her gates, and told  
 Into freed Israel’s lap her jewels and her gold.



" And when their wondrous march was o'er,  
 And they had won their homes  
 Where Abraham fed his flock of yore,  
 Among their fathers' tombs,—  
 A land that drinks the rain of heaven at will,  
 Whose waters kiss the feet of many a vine-clad hill ;—

" Oft as they watch'd, at thoughtful eve,  
 A gale from bowers of balm  
 Sweep o'er the billowy corn, and heave  
 The tresses of the palm,  
 Just as the lingering Sun had touch'd with gold,  
 Far o'er the cedar shade, some tower of giants old ;—

" It was a fearful joy, I ween,  
 To trace the Heathen's toil :—  
 The limpid wells, the orchards green  
 Left ready for the spoil,  
 The household stores untouch'd, the roses bright  
 Wreath'd o'er the cottage walls in garlands of delight.

" And now another Canaan yields  
 To thine all-conquering ark ;—  
 Fly from the ' old poetic' fields,  
 Ye Paynim shadows dark !  
 Immortal Greece, dear land of glorious lays,  
 Lo ! here ' the unknown God ' of thy unconscious praise !

" The olive wreath, the ivied wand,  
 ' The sword in myrtles drest,'  
 Each legend of the shadowy strand  
 Now wakes a vision blest :  
 As little children lisp, and tell of Heaven,  
 So thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given.

" And these are ours ; Thy partial grace  
 The tempting treasure lends :  
 These relics of a guilty race  
 Are forfeit to thy friends :  
 What seem'd an idol-hymn now breathes of Thee,  
 Tuned by Faith's ear to some celestial melody.

" There 's not a strain to Memory dear,  
 Nor flower in classic grove,  
 There 's not a sweet note warbled here,  
 But minds us of thy Love.  
 O Lord, our Lord, and spoiler of our foes.  
 There is no light but thine : with Thee all beauty glows."

To return to "Thalaba:" it would be a delightful task to follow the course of this remarkable and beautiful poem ; but, drawing now towards

the close of these lectures, I have learned, by repeated experience, some little of the virtue of forbearance, and the necessity of passing over many more things than the large demands I have made on your patience would lead you to suppose. One or two passages I must allude to. No poem is adorned with a more beautiful love-story than that of Thalaba and Oneiza :—

“ Oneiza eall’d him brother, and the youth  
 More fondly than a brother loved the maid ;  
 The loveliest of Arabian maidens she.  
     How happily the years  
     Of Thalaba went by !  
 . . . . . In deep and breathless tenderness,  
     Oneiza’s soul is centred on the youth,  
 So motionless, with such an ardent gaze,  
     Save when from her full eyes  
 She wipes away the swelling tears  
     That dim his image there.

“ She eall’d him brother : was it sister love  
     For which the silver rings  
 Round her smooth ankles and her tawny arms  
 Shone daily brighten’d ? for a brother’s eye  
     Were her long fingers tinged,  
     As when she trimm’d the lamp  
 And through the veins and delicate skin  
 The light shone rosy ? that the darken’d lids  
 Gave yet a softer lustre to her eye ?  
     That with such pride she triek’d  
 Her glossy tresses, and on holy-day  
 Wreath’d the red flower-crown round  
     Their waves of glossy jet ?  
     How happily the days  
     Of Thalaba went by !  
 Years of his youth, how rapidly ye fled ! ”

A drear winter was to close over this happy spring,—a tragic ending to this bright promise. The trial of his faith which most heavily crushes the heart of Thalaba is when the angel of death invades the bridal chamber ; and then follows that woeful description,—his ghastly wretchedness at Oneiza’s grave :—

“ By the tomb lay Thalaba,  
 In the light of the setting eve.  
 The sun, and the wind, and the rain,  
 Had rusted his raven locks ;  
 His cheeks were fallen in,  
 His faee-bones prominent.

Reclined against the tomb he lay,  
 And his lean fingers play'd,  
 Unwitting, with the grass that grew beside."

When Thalaba's unwearied faith approaches its consummation,—the good fight nearly finished, the race nearly won,—the ministering spirits come closer to his path, and he hears a spiritual welcoming from the angel voice of his lost Oneiza:—

"Was there a spirit in the gale  
 That flutter'd o'er his cheek?  
 For it came on him like the new risen sun,  
 Which plays and dallies o'er the night-closed flower,  
 "And woos it to unfold anew to joy?  
 For it came on him as the dews of eve  
 Descend with healing and with life  
 Upon the summer mead;  
 Or liker the first sound of seraph-song  
 And angel-greeting to the soul  
 Whose latest sense had shudder'd at the groan  
 Of anguish, kneeling by a death-bed side."

It gives a vivid impression of the versatility of Southey's genius to turn from a spiritual and wildly-supernatural poem like "Thalaba" to his poetical odes. The finest of these were written during the long strife between his country and Napoleon. I cannot stop to characterize that contest, or to say how far I consider the poet's strain against the adversary to be justified. It is with the poetry, and not the politics, I have to deal. This only let me say: that the war with the French Empire is a grand chapter in British history, and that I know not where an American or a republican can find just ground for any sympathy with a military despotism. The trumpet-sounds of Southey's poetry came forth from his mountain dwelling to cheer and fortify the hearts of his countrymen. His heart never lost its faith that there is a moral strength mightier and more enduring than the perishable power of armies. He spake to the nation in the spirit of that noble line which he had spoken to himself in early manhood:—

*"Onward in faith, and leave the rest to Heaven!"*

And it is a grand thing to behold the poet, like his own Thalaba, ever faithful, hopeful alike in seasons of victory and of doubt, and to hear him at last raising the exultant strain of triumph, as over the disastrous retreat from Moscow:—

"Witness that dread retreat,  
 When God and nature smote  
 The tyrant in his pride!

Victorious armies follow'd on his flight ;  
 On every side he met  
 The Cossack's dreadful spear ;  
 On every side he saw  
 The injured nation rise  
 Invincible in arms.

What myriads, victims of one wicked will,  
 Spent their last breath in curses on his head !  
 There where the soldier's blood  
 Froze in the festering wound,  
 And nightly the cold moon  
 Saw sinking thousands in the snow lie down  
 Whom there the morning found  
 Stiff as their icy bed ! ”

The highest and most impetuous of these strains is the ode written during the negotiations with Napoleon in 1814. Since Milton's tremendous imprecation against the Papal tyranny on occasion of the Piedmontese massacre, I know of no piece of political invective equal to it. It is hurled with the force and the fire of a thunderbolt, one burst of indignation following another, and closing with an accumulation of all the deeds of blood identified with the name of him who had been at once the terror and the wonder of Europe. Let me give the opening and ending stanzas of the ode :—

“ Who counsels peace at this momentous hour,  
 When God hath given deliverance to the oppress'd,  
 And to the injured power ?  
 Who counsels peace when vengeance, like a flood,  
 Rolls on, no longer now to be repress'd ;  
 When innocent blood,  
 From the four quarters of the world, cries out  
 For justice upon one accursed head ;  
 When Freedom hath her holy banners spread  
 Over all nations, now in one just cause  
 United ;—when, with one sublime accord,  
 Europe throws off the yoke abhorr'd,  
 And loyalty and faith and ancient laws  
 Follow the avenging sword ?

“ Woe, woe to England ! woe and endless shame,  
 If this heroic land,  
 False to her feelings and unspotted fame,  
 Hold out the olive to the tyrant's hand !  
 Woe to the world if Buonaparte's throne  
 Be suffer'd still to stand !

" France ! if thou lov'st thine ancient fame,  
 Revenge thy sufferings and thy shame.  
 By the bones which bleach on Jaffa's beach ;  
 By the blood which on Domingo's shore  
 Hath clogg'd the carrion-birds with gore ;  
 By the flesh which gorged the wolves of Spain,  
 Or stiffen'd on the snowy plain  
     Of frozen Muscovy ;  
 By the bodies which lie all open to the sky,  
 Tracking from Elbe to Rhine the tyrant's flight ;  
     By the widows' and the orphans' cry ;  
     By the childless parents' misery ;  
     By the lives which he hath shed ;  
     By the ruin he hath spread ;  
 By the prayers which rise for curses on his head,—  
 Redeem, O France ! thine ancient fame !  
 Revenge thy sufferings and thy shame !

" Open thine eyes ! Too long hast thou been blind !  
 Take vengeance for thyself and for mankind !  
     By those horrors which the night  
     Witness'd when the torch's light  
     To the assembled murderers show'd  
     Where the blood of Condé flow'd ;  
     By thy murder'd Pichegru's fame ;  
     By murder'd Wright,—an English name ;  
     By murder'd Palm's atrocious doom ;  
     By murder'd Hofer's martyrdom ;  
 Oh ! by the virtuous blood thus vilely spilt,  
 The Villain's own peculiar, private guilt,—  
 Open thine eyes ! Too long hast thou been blind !  
 Take vengeance for thyself and for mankind."

From these notes, tuned in tumultuous times, and fit to cope with the tempest's swell, let me further illustrate the varied power of Southey's genius by turning to a passage in his pleasing poem, "The Tale of Paraguay." It is an exquisite specimen of purely pathetic poetry,—full of the truth of feeling and of fancy,—the description of the death-bed of a young and innocent female. What can be more beautiful or much touching than the line which actually pictures to your imagination the sweet smile of the dying one ?—

    " Who could dwell  
     Unmoved upon the fate of one so young,—  
     So blithesome late ? What marvel if tears fell  
     From that good man, as over her he hung,  
 And that the prayers he said came faltering from his tongue ?



“ She saw him weep, and she could understand  
 The cause thus tremulously that made him speak.  
 By his emotion moved, she took his hand ;  
 A gleam of pleasure o’er her pallid cheek  
 Pass’d, while she look’d at him with meaning meek,  
 And for a little while, as loth to part,  
 Detaining him, her fingers lank and weak  
 Play’d with their hold ; then, letting him depart,  
*She gave him a slow smile, that touch’d him to the heart.*

“ Mourn not for her ; for what hath life to give  
 That should detain her ready spirit here ?  
 Think’st thou that it were worth a wish to live,  
 Could wishes hold her from her proper sphere ?  
 That simple heart, that innocence sincere,  
 The world would stain. Fitter she ne’er could be  
 For the great change ; and, now that change is near,  
 Oh, who would keep her soul from being free ?  
 Maiden beloved of Heaven, to die is best for thee !

“ She hath pass’d away, and on her lips a smile  
 Hath settled, fix’d in death. Judged they aright,  
 Or suffer’d they their fancy to beguile  
 The reason, who believed that she had sight  
 Of heaven before her spirit took its flight ?—  
 That angels waited round her lowly bed,  
 And that, in that last effort of delight,  
 When, lifting up her dying arms, she said,  
 ‘ I come,’ a ray from heaven upon her face was shed ? ”

I might exhibit yet another phase of Southey’s poetry in his humorous pieces. No man has better shown that one trait of genius,—the carrying forward the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood :—

“ My days have been the days of joy,  
 And all my paths are paths of pleasantness ;  
 And still my heart, as when I was a boy,  
 Doth never know an ebb of cheerfulness.  
 Time, which matures the intellectual part,  
 Hath tinged my hairs with grey, but left untouch’d my heart.”

This natural and cultivated cheerfulness has vented itself in his playful poetry, to relieve his own exuberant feelings and to gladden his happy household group. There is something exceedingly fine in hearing him at one time uttering strains that sound from Arabia, or Gothic Spain, or the wilds of America, or from the magic supernatural caverns under the night of the ocean,—at another time sounding one of those tremendous imprecations on the head of Buonaparte,—and then to find him

writing, from the fulness of a father's heart, poetic stories for his children. This he deemed part of his vocation ; for, as he sings in one of his sportive lyrics :—

“ I am laureate  
To them and the king.”

No man ever clung with deeper or manlier devotion to his household gods. For his children's sake, and for the sake of his own moral nature, he ever kept the young heart alive within him. There was wisdom in this, as he has shown in the plea that he has appended to one of his wild ballads :—

“ I told my tale of the Holy Thumb,  
That split the dragon asunder ;  
And my daughters made great eyes as they heard,  
Which were full of delight and wonder.

“ With listening lips and looks intent,  
There sate an eager boy,  
Who shouted sometimes and clapt his hands,  
And could not sit still for joy.

“ But when I look'd at my mistress' face,  
It was all too grave the while,  
And when I ceased, methought there was more  
Of reproof than of praise in her smile.  
That smile I read aright, for thus,  
Reprovingly, said she :—  
' Such tales are meet for youthful ears,  
But give little content to me.  
From thee far rather would I hear  
Some sober, sadder lay,  
Such as I oft have heard, well pleased,  
Before those locks were grey.'

“ ‘ Nay, mistress mine,’ I made reply ;  
' The autumn hath its flowers,  
Nor ever is the sky more gay  
Than in its evening hours.  
That sense which held me back in youth  
From all intemperate gladness,  
That same good instinct bids me shun  
Unprofitable sadness.  
Nor marvel you if I prefer  
Of playful themes to sing :  
The October grove hath brighter tints  
Than summer or than spring ;  
For o'er the leaves, before they fall,  
Such hues hath nature thrown,

That the woods wear in sunless days  
 A sunshine of their own.  
 Why should I seek to call forth tears ?  
 The source from whence we weep  
 Too near the surface lies in youth ;  
 In age it lies too deep.

“ ‘ Enough of foresight sad, too much  
 Of retrospect have I ;  
 And well for me that I sometimes  
 Can put those feelings by.  
 “ ‘ From public ills and thoughts that else  
 Might weigh me down to earth ;  
 That I can gain some intervals  
 For healthful, hopeful mirth.’ ”

It only remains for me to show that that spirit of mirth was healthful, —a help to his moral strength, and consistent with a profound spirit of meditation. Let us turn, therefore, to the sublime closing strains of the most spiritual of his lyrical poems,—the noble ode on the portrait of Bishop Heber. They had been friends ; and, when India’s saintly bishop was no longer upon the earth, Southey’s heart was strongly stirred as he gazed upon his portrait :—

“ O Reginald ! one course  
 Our studies and our thoughts,  
 Our aspirations, held.

\* \* \* \*

We had a bond of union, closely knit  
 In spirit, though in this world’s wilderness  
 Apart our lots were cast.

\* \* \* \*

“ Hadst thou revisited thy native land,  
 Mortality, and Time,  
 And Change, must needs have made  
 Our meeting mournful. Happy he  
 Who to his rest is borne,  
 In sure and certain hope,  
 Before the hand of age  
 Hath chill’d his faculties,  
 Or sorrow reach’d him in his heart of hearts !  
 Most happy if he leave in his good name  
 A light for those who follow him,  
 And in his works a living seed  
 Of good, prolific still !

“ Yes, to the Christian, to the heathen world,  
 Heber, thou art not dead —thou canst not die,

Nor can I think of thee as lost.  
A little portion of this little isle  
At first divided us ; then half the globe ;  
The same earth held us still ; but when,  
O Reginald ! wert thou so near as now ?  
'T is but the falling of a wither'd leaf,  
    The breaking of a shell,  
    The rending of a veil !  
    Oh, when that leaf shall fall,  
That shell be burst, that veil be rent, may then  
    My spirit be with thine ! ”



## LECTURE XIV.

### Byron.

A CATHOLIC TASTE IN LITERATURE—DIFFICULTIES OF A COURSE OF CRITICAL LECTURES—SOUTHEY AND BYRON—THE SPIRIT OF CRITICISM, THE SPIRIT OF CHARITY—ROGERS'S PLEA FOR BYRON'S MEMORY—POPULARITY OF HIS POETRY—"ENGLISH BARDS AND SCOTCH REVIEWERS"—"CHILDE HAROLD"—HIS LOVE OF EXTERNAL NATURE—FORMATION OF HIS LITERARY CHARACTER—ADMIRATION FOR POPE—SUCCESS OF "CHILDE HAROLD"—HIS ORIENTAL TALES—LITERATURE OF THE LAST CENTURY—STORY OF BYRON'S MARRIAGE—NOCTES AMBROSIANÆ—CONTRAST BETWEEN THE "CORSAIR" AND THE "PRISONER OF CHILLON"—"THE DREAM"—MATERIALISM IN HIS POETRY—MANFRED—VENICE—THE DYING GLADIATOR—STRAINS FOR LIBERTY—BEAUTY OF WOMANLY HUMANITY—"SARDANAPALUS"—BYRON'S SELFISHNESS—HIS INFIDELITY.

IN one of the introductory lectures of this course I took occasion to advert to the importance of cultivating a *catholic* taste in literature, and, in so doing, gave at least an implied pledge that it should be one of my chief efforts to carry the same spirit into what I might wish to say to you on the many and multiform productions of English poetry. A rash or a meek originality lies not within my ambition; and I have striven so to govern my voice that it should not convey to your ears old errors or old truisms disguised as startling paradoxes, that you should not turn from my opinions as prejudices or feel a wound given to your own prepossessions. Indeed, I have desired to introduce into these lectures no more of my own opinions than the very nature of my position made necessary, and, avoiding the spirit of the judge or the advocate, simply to set before your minds the poets as they have risen in succession on the glorious registry we have been examining, to open and illustrate the hidden nature of their genius, and then to leave you to know and to feel the character and spirit of their poetry. Believing that every profession has its peculiar temptation and peril, and that the professional teacher has most need to be on his guard against the insidious habit of dogmatizing, I have arrogated no authority for my opinions. But when I have felt assured that they had a root of truth, and branching aspirations after truth, I have given them utterance, trusting that the sounds awakened by the breath of poetic inspiration would prove sounds of truth.



I have refrained from adverting at any time to the difficulties which may attend the prosecution of a course of lectures such as we have been engaged in, for the simple reason that it belongs to the lecturer alone to measure and meet them, and it is a matter of small moment whether they are appreciated or not by his hearers. One difficulty may be made in some measure an exception to the rule of silence, for partially it is shared by both parties. I mean the difficulty, consequent on a rapid succession of criticisms, of making the requisite transfer of the mind from one subject to another. No one, whether for the purpose of forming a critical opinion or of reading without any thought of criticism, can gain a real knowledge of an author, and, most of all authors, of a poet, without entering into the spirit of his writings, be that spirit a right spirit or a wrong spirit. It is almost essential to stand upon his place of vision, and then, when it becomes necessary, to change that for the position of another poet,—to pass quickly from sympathy with one to sympathy with another, the elements of sympathy being often in all respects different. Let me say, without, I hope, subjecting myself to the imputation of seeking indirectly to magnify the labours of my course, the task is no easy one. It brings perplexity of mind with it. The transitions must often be sudden and violent: one set of feelings must be laid down and another taken up with a promptness and dexterity which, to employ a familiar illustration, may be likened to the attempt to accommodate our raiment to the changes of a fickle climate with its hasty revolutions of heat and cold. Each poet of original genius dwells in an atmosphere of his own, and he who seeks to know him must learn to breathe it, whether it be pure or noxious: he must needs live in it for a brief space.

But I can fancy that some of you are beginning to ask, Why this unwonted preface? Unwonted, because, whatever sins of tediousness may rest upon me, there has been no introductory loitering; for the first sentence of my lecture has, I believe, for the most part, taken you straightway into the very subject of it. If a different style of introduction is given to the present lecture, it is because in no instance has the transition been so toilsome to my mind. Between the requisite sympathy with the genius of the poet I last parted with, and that with him I am approaching, lies a wide and dreary gulf. What is it that I am passing from? and what is it I am coming to? It was but a few days ago that I was dealing with the faithful, pure, single-hearted, cheerful Southey, whose imagination seemed to have been strengthened and steadied by the resolution in that admirable line, which has been sounding to my heart since I first found it:—

*“ Onward in faith, and leave the rest to Heaven ! ”—*

so that, as I followed his footsteps and his flights, I felt that there was a path in which as firm a pace might be taken. From this I have to turn away and enter on the faithless, hopeless, wayward, and wondrous career of the darkened and distempered genius of Byron. I have been guided in the study of the various powers of the poets who have gone before, by principles of the nature of poetry, its constituent properties, and its purposes, in which I have yet found no reason to believe my confidence misplaced. Should they bring me to conclusions, respecting the true measure of Byron's endowments, different from the general estimate that has been formed of them, I cannot believe that his genius transcends the reach of principles that serve for the measurement of the poetry of Shakspeare and Spenser and Milton. The aberrations of Byron's talents may perplex and baffle the application of those principles; but surely it is better to hold fast to them than, casting them aside, to indulge in indiscriminate panegyrics or indiscriminate censure. If, therefore, the tone of criticism in this lecture should sound differently from what has preceded it, the source of that change may be sought in the nature of the subject.

There may be among those who are listening to me not a few ardent admirers of Lord Byron's poetry; there may be some—a far smaller number—who find in it ground only for reprobation. To both these this lecture can scarce fail to prove unsatisfactory, but not more than to a third party,—the lecturer himself. If I brought to the task powers of criticism greater than any I can lay claim to, still the discussion must be singularly imperfect, because there are qualities in Byron's poetical character—essential characteristics in the very heart of it—which I have not the audacity, even if I had the inclination, to speak of. If, casting off all the restraints instinctively recognised by every—I will not say only gentleman, but every decent man,—I were to take the full scope of his powers and attempt a complete discussion of the subject, men would cry out “Shame!” and the cheek of every woman would burn with crimson blushes; and yet the offensive topics would be unexceptionably appropriate to them. I have encountered no such difficulty as this before, from the age of old Chaucer down; for while, indeed, the pages of the elder poets were sometimes defaced by impurities, the grossness of a gross age, they were extrinsic and, as it were, accidental, and therefore might properly and justly be cast aside as unimportant in the estimate of those poets. In the present case, however, you cannot escape from the impurities; for I put it to the candour of those who are most thoroughly acquainted with Lord Byron's writings, whether there is one volume of them in which you will not

encounter either infidelity, or profanity, or obscenity, or vulgarity, and not unfrequently all of them? I make this remark, not because I am going on thus to characterize Byron's character, but merely to suggest how much the interest is impaired in the discussion of an author's character when there is imperative necessity of passing in silence over some of its prominent features. I have no desire to say harsh things of the poet and to repeat the often-repeated charges against his works. Far more pleasing would be the task of vindicating their errors, and of showing that, like the frailties of Burns, they might be detached so as to leave unimpaired and uncontaminated the other and better aspirations connected with them. I would gladly seek to save the glory of a true poet; for each one added to the list, already so rich in names, is so much added to the glory and the value of the literature of our language. I know, too, that the true spirit of criticism is the spirit of charity and of candour; and, where there are faults which do not enter into the very constitution of an author's mind, it is far better to throw over them the veil of silence and forgetfulness. I am not conscious that the evil spirit of censoriousness has insinuated itself into my course, and trust I shall not be regarded as suffering it now to get the advantage of me. In entering upon some revision of Byron's poems for the preparation of this lecture, I chanced to encounter the touching plea for his memory from the pen of a brother-poet who knew and loved him, that kind-hearted veteran, the poet Rogers:—

“He is now at rest;

And praise and blame fall on his ear alike,  
Now dull in death. Yes, Byron, thou art gone,—  
Gone like a star that through the firmament  
Shot, and was lost in its eccentric course,  
Dazzling, perplexing.

\* \* \* \* \*

“If in thy life

Not happy, in thy death thou surely wert,—  
Thy wish accomplish'd: dying in the land  
Where thy young mind had caught ethereal fire,—  
Dying in Greece, and in a cause so glorious.

“Thou art gone :

And he who would assail thee in thy grave,—  
Oh, let him pause! For who among us all,  
Tried as thou wert even from thy earliest years,  
When wandering yet, unspoilt, a Highland boy,—  
Tried as thou wert, and with thy soul of flame,—  
Pleasure, while yet the down was on thy cheek,  
Uplifting, pressing, and to lips like thine,

Her charm'd cup,—ah! who among us all  
 Could say he had not err'd as much and more? ” \*

The feeling which prompted this appeal, and its source, entitled it to a respectful consideration. It would indeed be unmanly and irrational to assail the poet in his grave, especially when we remember his life full of wretchedness and his death-bed clouded with spiritual darkness. But his poems are living things: the sanctity of the grave does not belong to them. They will live, though not in the full vitality of their first fame. And equally unmanly and equally irrational appears to me the habit of silencing the voice of even-tempered opinion by the sickly, sentimental commiseration for poor Byron.

I shall make no attempt, in illustration of my subject, to follow, regularly, the irregular course of the poet's life. It is a well-known story, from his boyish rambles in the Scottish Highlands, his London life, with all its metropolitan pleasures, his adventurous wanderings on the Continent, his years of Italian profligacy, down to the dismal expiring amid the marshes of Missolonghi. The annals of English poetry present nothing equal to the popularity which was gained by Lord Byron's poetry. It was speedy, it was strong, it was wide-spread, and during his life did not, perhaps, suffer a very serious decline. The literary student well knows that mere popularity does not surely betoken an abiding fame. In the extraordinary reception of Byron's poetry, I am disposed to think that there is proof of both the poetic virtues and vices which characterize it. How could he have found entrance into so many hearts if he possessed not some of those powers of imagination which sooner or later find their path? How, on the other hand, is it possible that he could have found that entrance so speedily, if the strains he was uttering were strains of the loftiest and best poetry? The world never yet, in any of its ages, has been ready for the prompt and intelligent reception of a great poet of original powers. It is not incredible that the fourteen thousand copies of a poem like "The Corsair" might be sold in one day, soon finding more, probably, than that number of readers; but, when poetry speaks in its mightiest tones,—those which have an echo of eternity in them,—the one living generation of mankind to whom they are addressed does not, the first moment, the first month, or the first year, open its heart to the sounds. Poetry which is addressed to the feelings, the fancy, and the imagination, in some of its lighter moods, is listened to and admired in its earliest hour; but that poetry for which fame, as distinguished from mere popularity, is in store,

\* "Italy."



as surely as it comes from the depths of the poet's soul, so surely it travels slowly, often toilsomely, sinking into the deep places of the souls of men,—its resting-place for ages. A brilliant and rapid popularity dazzles and misleads the judgment: a rocket-fire will leap up into the heavens, outshining and outstripping the stars, while the steady orb of a planet—its golden urn filled at the fountain of the sun—is climbing, imperceptibly and noiselessly, up the eastern region of the firmament. The memory of an author's popularity—the recollection of the feelings with which he was once read—will continue to mislead. If, for instance, any one desire to form a safe and permanent opinion of Byron's poetry, let me warn him not to trust to the impressions remaining from former intercourse with it; but, examining it anew, more calmly, more cautiously, and, if possible, with a judgment fortified by the study of those masters of English song whose fame is undisputed, and then, but not till then, whatever conclusion he may arrive at, will it be his right to speak with confidence.

The juvenile poems which introduced Lord Byron into literary life gave little promise of his future career, and have their chief interest in indirectly leading to his next publication,—one of a widely-different character,—the “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.” The contemptuous treatment of his youthful verses by the “Edinburgh Review” wounded him deeply, and helped to injure a mind easily swayed by any untoward influence. He felt a consciousness of more poetic power than he had been able to express, which made him more sensitive to the wrong and more ready to seek his revenge. The satirical poem he was thus prompted to write served to fix on his character that sullen and malevolent habit which it became more and more his delight to indulge in; and, in this instance, the shaft which had pierced him seems so to have poisoned his heart, that he rushed forth to scatter his darts in an indiscriminate warfare alike upon reviewers and his brother-poets. It was the beginning of a system of hostilities such as no poet ever waged before. Dryden and Pope had each of them laid a heavy hand upon the poetasters and scribblers of their times; but never before Byron was a poet found who could seek to soil with bitter and contemptuous insults the fair fame of his contemporaries, whose merits he was constrained, in some chance moods of better feelings, to recognise. His youthful satire was a bold assault upon the citadel of criticism, and served, no doubt, to prompt a very ready attention to his next work, his first important poem and the one on which his general reputation chiefly rests,—“The Pilgrimage of Childe Harold.”

The first and second cantos of “Childe Harold” appeared, it will be



remembered, some years earlier than the third and fourth ; and, as they gave him rank as a poet, let us briefly notice their relation to his personal life. When Byron reached the limit of manhood, he had already run no short distance in his unbridled race of self-indulgence. He revelled in the voluptuousness of the looser portion of the British aristocracy ; and no wonder, therefore, that, to apply to him the words of one of his own dramas, he was full of pride,—

“ And the deep passions fiercely foster’d by  
The uses of patricians.”

He was not in habits of healthy intercourse with his fellow-beings. The love of external nature, which became a passion with him, and which he himself regarded, probably, as the predominant trait of his genius, does not seem to have been developed by the familiar prospect of his own country. It was rather awakened by the more active stimulant of the strange scenery presented by foreign travel. Previously his communion with nature—that precious discipline for the poet’s mind—was little more than in the way of some of the strenuous bodily exercises, the favourite and most innocent modes of excitement in which he luxuriated,—the delight, for instance, of wrestling with the billows of the sea, “ borne, like its bubbles, onward,”—or, as he has somewhere said in a figure which seems an image of his life, with no mastery over his passions, but hurried a helpless thing, wherever their tides might drift him,—

“ Swept like a weed upon the ocean waves ! ”

The passionate pleasure of a lusty swimmer was a real emotion with him,—an active emotion too, and not, like many of his feelings, unreal and ending in empty and morbid affectations. The thought of it coming over his mind had the power—for this was a thing of truth—to kindle his imagination into the finest description poetry has perhaps ever given of a swimmer’s intense and earnest delight. It occurs in one of his tragedies, and will be found a passage of more genuine poetry than the more celebrated apostrophe to the ocean at the close of “ *Childe Harold*.” It is superior both in imagination and expression :—

“ How many a time have I  
Cloven, with arm still lustier, breast more daring,  
The wave all roughen’d with a swimmer’s stroke ;  
Flinging the billows back from my drench’d hair  
And laughing from my lip the audacious brine  
Which kiss’d it like a wine-cup, rising o’er  
The waves as they arose, and prouder still  
The loftier they uplifted me ; and oft,

In wantonness of spirit, plunging down  
Into their green and glassy gulfs, and making  
My way to shells and seaweeds, all unseen  
By those above, till they wax'd fearful ; then,  
Returning with my grasp full of such tokens  
As show'd that I had search'd the deep, exulting  
With a far-dashing stroke, and drawing deep  
The long-suspended breath, again I spurn'd  
The foam that broke around me, and pursued  
My track like a sea-bird. I was a boy then."

This is a description full of imagination and truth, and well describing the poet's own active communion with nature and the elements.

It is a consideration, in examining a poet's character, not to be overlooked, how far his natural endowments have been cultivated by study of the principles of his art as exemplified in the approved productions of his predecessors. This cultivation no one, no matter what may be his native gifts, can venture to despise ; indeed, the greater his powers the more valuable is such discipline, for it seems to chasten and to strengthen, without the peril of servility of imitation. Every one of the greatest poets in our language, holding an independent and majestic attitude of originality, yet deemed it a worthy thing to study with a docile spirit the inspirations of the mighty bards who had gone before. In the formation of Byron's literary character this cultivation was grievously wanting. His knowledge derived from books was no more than the casual results of the light and purposeless reading of a gentleman of the ordinary degree of accomplishment. Neither his habits of study, nor his attainments, were calculated to invigorate his intellectual or imaginative faculties. His acquaintance with English poetry was by no means extensive, and his tastes singularly contracted. Of Chaucer his only mention is in terms of strong and supercilious—and, let me add, ignorant—contempt. There is no evidence of familiarity with either Spenser, or Shakspeare, or Milton, and, indeed, proof that his sympathy with their immortal works was small and sluggish. They had no place in his affections. Now, some may be inclined to discover in this signs of Byron's power and his originality ; but the history of the minds of his most illustrious predecessors is an insuperable obstacle to all this sophistry. Besides, this imperfect and careless cultivation led to no such independence. It did lead to literary bigotry and intolerance, narrow tastes, and acrimonious opposition to whatever thwarted them. His critical opinions were often so perversely peculiar, that we might rather attribute them to his habitual recklessness of truth, were there not sufficient reason to believe him sincere in them. What but the dog-

matism of a half-educated and ill-disciplined mind could speak in such words as these, to be found in one of Byron's prose pieces?—"I would no more say that Pope is as high a poet as Shakspeare and Milton, than I would, in the mosque (once St. Sophia's), that Socrates was a greater man than Mohammed. But, if any great natural or national convulsion could or would sweep Great Britain from the kingdoms of the earth, and leave only that after all the most living of human things, a dead language, to be studied and read and imitated by the wise of future and far generations, upon foreign shores,—if English literature should become the learning of mankind, divested of party cabals, temporary fashions, and national pride and prejudices,—an Englishman, anxious that the posterity of strangers should know that there had been such a thing as a British Epic and Tragedy, might wish for the preservation of Shakspeare and Milton; but the surviving world would snatch Pope from the wreck and let the rest sink with the people. He is the moral poet of all civilization; and, as such, let us hope that he will one day be the national poet of mankind." Was there ever such extravagance? Shakspeare and Milton sinking with the people, and Pope, snatched by the surviving world from the abyss of perishing England, be the national poet of the whole human race! But, so far was Byron's want of cultivation from increasing his originality by separating him from other influences, that it was the very cause which impaired it; for, unarmed with settled principles of his art, no one more frequently lapsed into unconscious imitations of his contemporaries,—the very poets whom he reviled, but from whose influences he could not wholly isolate himself. It was this, too, which may explain the changeable character of his poetry. One while you meet with what may be pronounced uncontrolled poetic inspiration; another while it becomes with him a thing of mere art. His mind seems to have reeled from one system to another, and never caught a steady view of the principle that poetry is both an inspiration and an art, demanding, therefore, natural endowment and studious cultivation. No art could ever give the poet's creative, shaping faculty of imagination; but equally true is it that no great poet has ever safely ventured to approach the principles of his art lightly and carelessly. Strange indeed would it be if that, the most precious talent intrusted to man, should multiply without the laborious cultivation which is a law to fallen humanity. The primal curse is upon the poet not less than on other men. He must *labour* in his vocation; for the last sounds of spontaneous poetry,—the instinctive imaginations, the natural melodies which made happy the heart of the new-created man,—passed away with the last gales that blew over Eden.

The merit of "Childe Harold" lies in the latter *cautos*; and, on turning at the present day to those which formed the first publication of the poem, the reader cannot there find the brilliant success, which instantly welcomed it, justified. "I woke," said Byron, "one morning and found myself famous." He had made his name known by his earlier poems; he now had newly returned from his foreign travels in Spain and Greece. Just entered into manhood,—a peer,—distinguished, too, for his personal beauty,—he had succeeded in throwing an air of romance around himself which was greatly increased by a mystical correspondence with the fictitious personage of the poem. There were flashes of scepticism and misanthropy which heightened the fascination; for they seemed strangely to accord with the feelings of a young nobleman, surrounded by wealth and fashion, returning from travels full of enterprise and an activity undiminished by luxurious habits of sensuality,—returning to take his seat in the House of Lords and to publish a poem which had been conceived and executed in distant lands. There were all the elements of a speedy and unbounded popularity. The form of the poem—travels in poetry—was attractive; and, making no demand upon the reader for any great sympathetic effort of imagination or reflection, it is not surprising that it was at once read and admired by thousands. The finest passages in the early cantos are those which were inspired upon the soil of Greece. The young poet's emotions awakened there were strong, and they were real; and with such impulse his imagination rises to a vivid vision of the ancient battle-field:—

"First bow'd beneath the brunt of Hellas' sword,  
As on the morn, to distant glory dear,  
When Marathon became a magic word,  
Which utter'd, to the hearer's eye appear  
The camp, the host, the flight, the conqueror's career!

"The flying Mede, his shaftless, broken bow;  
The fiery Greek, his red pursuing spear;  
Mountains above, earth's, ocean's plains below,  
Death in the front, destruction in the rear!—  
Such was the scene. What now remaineth here?  
What sacred trophy marks the hallow'd ground,  
Recording Freedom's smile and Asia's tear?—  
The rifled urn, the violated mound,  
The dust thy courser's hoof, rude stranger, spurns around."

In quick succession followed the *Oriental Tales*, every way fitted to sustain and increase the poet's popularity, not less by passages of brilliant poetry than by the dazzling melodramatic effect resulting from the frameworks of the poems, the pomp and circumstance of Eastern life,



with names and words known only in fanciful associations,—these, the accidents, as I may call them, the costume and scenery, greatly enhance the interest of these productions. They fostered Byron's propensity to deal with exaggerations of depravity,—the moral monsters, like his Corsair, “linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes.” Surely it was a small game for one gifted like Byron to be playing over again the exploded extravagancies of the sickly romantic novel, by once more bringing forward that unnatural, unmeaning race of imaginary beings,—the sentimental villains. It had grown to be ridiculous in those prose fictions which, imitating humanity so abominably, had given way before the true and manlier novel of the Waverley school; but literary heresies, like worn-out heresies in the church, often revive in a new disguise, to be again welcomed by a morbid and unchastened taste, the appetite that feeds on criminal records and the dying confessions of murderers, and stories of inhuman and superhuman atrocity. The stock-players in the worthless novels and romances which filled the circulating libraries of the last century were bravos and bandits and assassins; and Lord Byron should have known that fictions, whether in prose or verse, with such heroes, were the meanest efforts of imagination, and addressed to a vulgar as well as an undisciplined spirit. It was a pitiful thing for a man to pander to and stimulate such tastes.

It has been my determination to have in this lecture as little to do as possible with Lord Byron's personal character, and to advert to it only when absolutely necessary, and where it is illustrative of the spirit of his writings. He has mingled the story of his marriage with his poetry. It was no strange thing that that marriage was an unhappy one. There was little, if any, love in it. It was one of those cool connections more common in a highly-artificial state of society than, happily, they are among us. I do not mean to say much about it; not that there can be doubt to whom the rupture and final separation were owing. The specific causes of it have not been revealed; but I want nothing more to satisfy me where the guilt lay, than a few incidents that are known. The story of Byron's life, as told by his friend and apologist, convicts him of that which is a man's most unmanly and pitiful habit,—*quarrelling with the women*. If any blind idolater of the poet can find in his heart to palliate this dark spot, let him only contrast the conduct of the parties. Lady Byron, with a womanly fortitude, preserving on the causes of their separation an indomitable silence, which cannot be too highly respected: he—the man with less than a man's sense of honour—assailing the mother of his child with published verses, an unnatural compound of sentiment and satire, proclaiming his boastful resolution never to touch



a shilling of his wife's fortune, and then breaking through his vain determination by grasping all that he could reach of it,—sentimentalizing about his daughter, and then plunging into a career of debauchery which left to that daughter the blackest of all legacies,—the memory of a parent's worst guilt.

This epoch of Byron's life I touch upon chiefly for the sake of noticing some of the matchless sophistry which has been employed in his apology. The biography of the poet was intrusted to an amiable and accomplished brother-poet, a writer overflowing with that fanciful style of feeling, styled "*sentimentality*." According to Moore's theory, what was the cause of Byron's matrimonial infelicity? His genius. For the sake of veiling the moral deformities of the noble poet, the biographer has raised a cloud of gaudy sophistry which casts a shade upon the grandest endowments of the human intellect. He would teach the dangerous fallacy that there is a dreary gulf between poetic power and domestic virtue and happiness; that genius of the higher order is a wild thing, "not to be tamed and domesticated in society;" that it must dwell in what he calls "the lonely laboratory of self:" to take up his words, that "genius ranks but low among the elements of social happiness; that, in general, the brighter the gift the more disturbing its influence, and that in married life particularly its effects have been too often like that of the 'wormwood star,' whose light filled the waters on which it fell with bitterness." "It is," he adds, "a coincidence no less striking than saddening, that on the list of married poets who have been unhappy in their homes there should already be found such illustrious names as Dante, Milton, Shakspeare, and Dryden, and that we should now have to add as a partner in their destiny a name worthy of being placed beside the greatest of them,—Lord Byron."

A passage like this calls for remark, not only for its own sake, but because it is a specimen of the systematic sentimental sophistry that has been woven around Lord Byron's memory. There is an evil spirit at work in it, confounding the sense of right and wrong, defacing and mutilating the landmarks of virtue and vice:—"fair is foul, and foul is fair." The doctrine is deliberately taught that the higher a man's intellectual powers, the further they are removed from the best elements of his moral being; that the qualities of the head and the heart travel in different and opposite roads. It is the old and shallow but not obsolete fallacy that genius is privileged to claim exemption from moral obligation; as if a human being were any the less a man because he is a poet!—a lawlessness which no truly great poet ever dreamed of arrogating. It is the fatal sophistry which would divorce genius from

its natural alliance with all that is good and noble and spiritual, and drive it to batten with the base, the selfish, and sensual. Moore brought to his argument all the force of his brilliant fancy; but it has been swept away by an answer, full not only of fancy but of truth, which was called forth in one of that remarkable series of papers, the "*Noctes Ambrosianæ*,"\*—witty, imaginative, and thoughtful. The vindication of genius and its capacity for domestic happiness is put in the mouth of the Ettrick Shepherd; and, after a careful refutation, it closes with this glowing prose rhapsody:—

"I have read Shakspeare and Milton many thousand times; and, Master Moore, you had no right, sir, by your *ipse dixit* to place Byron by the side of them two,—the greatest of all the children of men: he must sit, in all his glory, far down beneath their feet." And then, as to the domestic virtues:—"Why, it is in the power of any one man of the higher order of genius—say poetical genius—to lavish, in the prodigality of his soul, more love on his wife during any one day—ay, any one hour—than it is in the capacity of a blockhead to bestow on his during fifty years, beginning with the first blink of the honeymoon and ending with the last hour that falls upon her coffin. Oh, what a fearful heap of passion can the poet cram into one embrace—one kiss—one smile—one look—one whisper—one word—towards the partner of his life, the mother of his weans! What though the poet's marriage-life be sometimes stormy?—what though sometimes

‘Blackness comes across it like a squall  
Darkening the sea’?

Yet who can paint the glory and the brightness of the celestial calm, when the world of them two—of him and his wife—may be likened to the ocean and all her isles in the breezy sunshine, and them two, themselves to consort-ships steering along with all their sails and all their streamers—no fear of shoals or lee-shore rocks—on, on, on, together, towards the haven of everlasting rest among the regions of the setting sun! Or when it may be likened—that is, the world of them two, of him and his wife—to the blue lift all a-lit with laverocks, and themselves, too, like consort-clouds, now a wee way apart, and now melting into one another, pursued by eyes looking up from below along their sky-course, of which the goal is set, by God's own hand, far away among the stars of heaven!"

Byron, his home desolate and his popularity followed by public odium, left his native land, never to revisit it. He found a dwelling for a time in the region of the Alps, and then passed into Italy; and this was the

\* Blackwood's Magazine.

period of his best poetry. The tumultuous passions which had agitated him not long before subsided into a gentler feeling than marked any other portion of his life. The tempest which had driven him from his domestic mooring was followed by a fitful calm. It is worthy of reflection that, in this mood of mind, his imagination displayed more true power than in the seasons of its false and morbid energy. The one was the vigour of health, the other, the force of fever. The mock and exaggerated sentiment which he dallied with in so many of his poems made room for that which was genuine pathos. This will be understood by all who are familiar with Byron's poetry,—and I am this evening calculating peculiarly on a general familiarity with the subject of the lecture,—it will be understood by suggesting to your recollections the contrast between "The Corsair" and that beautiful poem, "The Prisoner of Chillon." To this period also belongs one of his pieces which seems to me to display more of genuine imagination, more chaste and better sustained, than any poem he has left. I refer to that entitled "The Dream." The marked years of his life are brought together by a fine imaginative effort, which blends also, with admirable effect, the actual and the spiritual. There is nothing counterfeit in it. The lights and shadows, glimmer and gloom, pass over the spirit of this dream, with all the reality of truth and imagination. The descriptions are worthy of all praise. How perfectly picturesque is the Eastern scene!—

"A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.  
 The boy was sprung to manhood : in the wilds  
 Of fiery climes he made himself a home,  
 And his soul drank their sunbeams ; he was girt  
 With strange and dusky aspects ; he was not  
 Himself like what he had been ; on the sea  
 And on the shore he was a wanderer ;  
 There was a mass of many images  
 Crowded like waves upon me ; but he was  
 A part of all : and in the last he lay  
 Reposing from the noontide sultriness,  
 Couch'd among fallen columns, in the shade  
 Of ruin'd walls that had survived the names  
 Of those who rear'd them ; by his sleeping side  
 Stood camels grazing, and some goodly steeds  
 Were fasten'd near a fountain ; and a man  
 Clad in a flowing garb did watch the while,  
 While many of his tribe slumber'd around ;  
 And they were canopied by the blue sky,  
 So cloudless, clear, and purely beautiful,  
 That God alone was to be seen in heaven !"

It was now, too, that the poet's love of external nature expanded

more. No poet ever enjoyed finer or more various opportunities of communion with the earth and the elements. He was a denizen of ocean and of lake, of Alpine regions and of Greek and Italian plains. He had a poet's quick susceptibility to the tumultuous sublimity and the placid beauty of the world of sense that surrounded him. There were times when his heart was open to these natural influences, so that there arose the true poetic sympathy between the inner world of spirit and the outer world of sense. The finest passages of the "Childe Harold" are those in which nature had her will with this wayward child:—

"Clear, placid Leman! thy contrasted lake,  
With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing  
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake  
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.  
This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing  
To waft me from distraction. Once I loved  
Torn Ocean's roar; but thy soft murmuring  
Sounds sweet as if a sister's voice reproved  
That I with stern delights should e'er have been so moved.

"It is the hush of night, and all between  
The margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,  
Mellow'd and mingling, yet distinctly seen,  
Save darken'd Jura, whose cap't heights appear  
Precipitously steep; and, drawing near,  
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,  
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood; on the ear  
Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,  
Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sky is changed!—and such a change! O night,  
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,  
Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light  
Of a dark eye in woman! Far along,  
From peak to peak the rattling crags among,  
Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,  
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,  
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,  
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud!

'And this is in the night. Most glorious night!  
Thou wert not sent for slumber! Let me be  
A sharer in thy fierce and free delight,—  
A portion of the tempest and of thee!  
How the lit lake shines,—a phosphoric sea,  
And the big rain comes dancing to the earth!  
And now again 't is black."



I would gladly break the quotation here, in the middle of the stanza, in order not to break the impression of a passage of such true poetry, which I would always wish to leave unimpaired; but (it vexes me to be obliged to use this qualifying particle but) there follows a striking exemplification of those tumid exaggerations which are the weakness mingled with the poet's power:—

“ And now the glee  
Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth,  
*As if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth.*”

The love of nature with Byron was passionate rather than either thoughtful or imaginative:

“ A feeling, and a love,  
That had no need of a remoter charm  
By thought supplied, nor any interest  
Unborrow'd from the eye.”

He knew, however, that it was necessary to make it something more,—that a great descriptive poet cannot rest contented with what is an appetite and a rapture. One of poetry's grandest purposes—the showing how the external world and the mind of man fitted to each other—was before him. His strong poetic instincts struggled towards it, but the moral weakness of his genius perverted and lowered his aspirations. The blindness of idolatry came over him; the world of sight and sound became a divinity to him. That which was intended for only the means for higher ends became all in all to him. The material world, which its Creator formed to minister food not only to our bodily wants but to the imaginative appetites, which feed on the grand and beautiful that meet the senses, hemmed his faithless spirit in, not because of its strength, which many have mistaken its turbulence for, but because of its weakness. In this I do not fear to say the imagination of Byron failed: it had not strength to extricate itself from the sophistries of materialism. The strong passion for nature with which he was doubtless gifted, the moment he strove to make it anything more than a passion, spent itself in misty, cloudy rhapsodies, meaningless of everything but the old errors of a sensual philosophy. The days of fascination gone by, it is time to understand that when Byron's poetry begins to utter materialism, it begins to utter folly, and then it ceases to be poetry, for poetry is allied to wisdom and madness. The poet had set up for his worship an idol as helpless as the headless trunk of Dagon. Quenching the true and spiritual love of nature, he talked of making the mountains his friends, and boasted that it was man's noblest companionship; but his heart told him, “ Miserable friends are ye.” It was his pride to love earth only for



its "earthly sake," and to talk unmeaningly of becoming "*a portion of that around him,*" of "*high mountains being a feeling to him,*" and that he could see

" Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be  
A link reluctant in that fleshly chain,  
Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,  
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain  
Of ocean, and the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

" And when at length the mind shall be all free  
From what it hates in this degraded form,  
Reft of its carnal life, save what shall be  
Existent happier in the fly and worm,—  
Where elements to elements conform  
And dust is as it should be,—shall I not  
Feel all I see, less dazzling but more warm ?  
The bodiless thought,—the spirit of each spot,—  
Of which even now I share at times the immortal lot ? "

Now, strip this, and the multitude of passages like it in Byron's poems, of all that is fantastic ; measure it, as you please, either by the practical rules of common sense, or by the ethereal standard of the imagination, and what is it but the perplexity and the folly of materialism ? What natural instinct is there, let me ask, so strong in the human heart as that which recoils from the dread anticipation that this living flesh of ours, or the cherished features of those that are dear to us, will be fed upon by worms in the grave ?—a thought that would crush us down in helpless abasement but for the one bright hope beyond. And then to think of a poet exulting in the prospect of that remnant of his carnal life "*existent happier in the worm*" ! When Byron is honoured as the great poet of nature, I wish you to understand where he will lead his disciple and where he will desert him. The material world has high and appropriate uses in the building up of a moral being : the study of it in the right spirit is full of instruction, but worthless and perilous if we lose sight of the great truth of the soul's spiritual supremacy over it,—that there is implanted in each human being an undying particle, destined to outlive not this earth alone, but the universe. The poet sent his materialized imagination to roam over the world of sense, ocean, and mountain, seeking what the world could not give. "*Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding ? The depth saith, It is not in me ; and the sea saith, It is not with me.*" \*

The frailty of Byron's imagination is betrayed not only in his abandonment of the spiritual principle within him, instead of subordinating the

\* Job, chap. xxvi. 2.

world of sense to it, but also in the inability to accomplish what he undertook, of imaginatively identifying himself with the material objects around him. This is a prime function of the faculty of imagination:—to fuse together things in their nature different, giving them a harmonious existence and making them as one. Remember how the passion with which Shakspeare invests any of his creations shapes and colours all it touches. When Byron labours to combine his own personal feelings with the influences of nature, he throws the elements together, but for the most part leaves them unmingled and in confusion. You find unconnected and incongruous sentiments,—the admiration of earth's loftiest scenes, with morbid and restless social passions: indeed, so incoherent does his imagination become that the chief element in his love of nature is hatred of mankind. The most strenuous effort of his imagination was the dramatic poem "*Manfred*," where he shapes into a visible form the beauty of inanimate foam,—the apparition of the beautiful witch of the Alps rising from the sunlit spray of the cataract. There is a passage in one of Byron's poems forming a splendid exception to the absence of the perfect combining power of imagination in so much of his descriptive poetry. It has the unaffected reality of true poetic sublimity in all the simplicity of imaginative truth. The lofty range of mountains, the history-hallowed battle-ground, the vast space of the ocean, are all vivified with the deep emotion of the one human being standing in the midst of them. The associating harmonizing energy of the poetic faculty blends all the elements in perfect union:—

*" The mountains look on Marathon,  
And Marathon looks on the sea ;  
And, musing there an hour alone,  
I dream'd that Greece might still be free ;  
For, standing on the Persian's grave,  
I could not deem myself a slave.*

*" A king sat on the rocky brow,  
Which looks o'er sea-born Salamis ;  
And ships by thousands lay below,  
And men in nations : all were his !  
He counted them at break of day ;  
And, when the sun set, where were they ? "*

Italy opened to the poet her ancient cities and her glorious works of sculpture, painting, and architecture; and, in this world of art, his imagination expatiated with more power and thought than in the world of nature. He stood in the Adriatic City, and its ancient splendour rose to his vision:—

"A thousand years their cloudy wings expand  
 Around me, and a dying glory smiles  
 O'er the far times, when many a subject land  
 Look'd to the wingéd lion's marble piles,  
 Where Venice sat in state, throned on her hundred isles!"

He beheld *the Eternal City*, the

"Childless and crownless, in her voiceless woe,  
 An empty urn within her wither'd hands,  
 Whose holy dust was scatter'd long ago."

He gazed upon the marble of the world-renowned Apollo:—

"The lord of the unerring bow,  
 The god of life and poesy and light,—  
 The sun in human limbs array'd, and brow  
 All radiant from his triumph in the fight:  
 The shaft hath just been shot,—*the arrow bright*  
*With an immortal vengeance*; in his eye  
 And nostril beautiful disdain, and might,  
 And majesty, flash their full lightnings by,  
 Developing in that one glance the deity."

He mused within the Coliseum; and, though mingling with his musings the spite of his petty quarrels, his weak hatred of man, and the worse and weaker hatred of woman,—the swelling subterfuge of moral littleness,—yet rising to the rapt vision of the dying athlete:—

"I see before me the gladiator lie:  
 He leans upon his hand; his manly brow  
 Consents to death, but conquers agony;  
 And his droop'd head sinks gradually low,  
 And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow,  
 From the red gash fall heavy, one by one,  
 Like the first of a thunder-shower: and now  
 The arena swims around him: he is gone  
 Ere ceased the inhuman shout that hail'd the wretch who won.

"He heard it, but he heeded not; his eyes  
 Were with his heart, and that was far away:  
 He reck'd not of the life he lost, nor prize,  
 But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,  
 There were his young barbarians, all at play;  
 There was their Dacian mother, he, their sire,  
 Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday:  
 All this rush'd with his blood. Shall he expiate,  
 And unavenged? Arise, ye Goths, and glut your ire!"

In this instance, the poet's morbid feelings passed into a pure channel,—the thought of his own separation from his child awakening, no doubt,

a fine sympathy with the gladiator's dismal dying emotions for his young barbarians on the distant Danube.

Passing from Byron's claims as the poet of nature, he has been styled the poet of freedom. Spirited lines have burst from him on this theme :—

“ Yet, Freedom ! yet thy banner, torn but flying,  
Streams like the thunder-storm against the wind ;  
Thy trumpet-voice, though broken now and dying,  
The loudest still, the tempest leaves behind.”

He harped upon the lost liberties of Italy and Greece, and the living liberties of America. Let us look, before rashly welcoming the alliance. The love of freedom with Byron was a sentiment, but it had no depth beyond that ; and, when you come to analyze it carefully, its elements are misanthropy and *lawlessness*. I never hear his tributes to our institutions quoted, without an instinctive regret that any countryman of mine should, in his avidity for foreign flattery, be thus deluded. The name of Washington is met with more than once in Byron's poems in terms of praise : that name is beyond the reach of contamination ; but still I recoil, as if it were profaned, when I contrast the manly, dutiful, genuine spirit of freedom in which he was nursed, with the spurious, fitful, sentimental licentiousness of the poet. When the tribute of a foreigner is rendered to our country or its men, I wish first to know whether that foreigner's heart is true to his own country, and not poisoned with a counterfeit liberality and a morbid hostility to that which nature and wisdom and truth all bid him hold dear. When a man like Southey points to this country as the land

“ *Where Washington hath left  
His awful memory  
A light to after-times !* ”

the tribute is worth something. But the spirit of freedom which gave that light could not be truly revered by one whose heart had grown hard in aristocratic licentiousness ; who, running the wild career of profligacy, sought the last stimulant of his morbid tastes in the sentimental luxury of a romantic crusade.

“ *The sensual and the dark rebel in vain ;* ”

and I deny the sincerity of Byron's professions and his power of knowing a genuine freedom, from the whole story of his life and mind. The true and the manly part was not a share in petty Italian tumults or in Greek revolutions, but to hold the responsible post at which his birth had placed him ; for if, as he proclaimed, the liberties of England were

in danger, the plainer and the stronger was it the duty of one gifted like him to battle for them to the last. That would have been indeed true energy, instead of its gaudy counterfeit in his sentimental recreancy.

If Lord Byron's descriptions of nature and his sense of freedom were imperfect and unequal, his portraiture of human characters is marked with the same imperfections. His imagination could not rise above the range of his own individual and morbid impulses. All his creations were of the same family, and all imaginatively kindred to himself,—impersonations of the same moral disease in some or other of its forms, and all betrayed a woeful, wilful ignorance of the better elements of human nature. Coloured by the poet's vivid fancy, they passed for heroes; but strip them of their disguise, their playhouse finery, and there is not one among them who rises—I will not say to the heroic standard, but—even to the level of real manliness. How opposite, it has been well said,\* was Shakspeare's conception of a hero!

“ Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core,—ay, in my heart of hearts.’

I need scarcely remark that a true idea of the strength and beauty of *womanly* humanity had no place in Byron's mind. It was almost an unknown world to him, abounding, at the same time, as his poems do, with bright romantic creations of fancy and sentiment. Of these, when placed in situations calling for masculine energy, he gives some striking images, as the description in “Sardanapalus:”—

“ She urged on with her voice and gesture, and  
Her floating hair and flashing eyes, the soldiers  
In the pursuit. \* \* \* \* I paused  
To look upon her, and her kindled cheek;  
Her large black eyes, that flash'd through her long hair  
As it stream'd o'er her; her blue veins that rose  
Along her most transparent brow; her nostril  
Dilated from its symmetry; her lips  
Apart; her voice that clove through all the din  
As a lute's pierceth through the cymbal's clash,  
Jarr'd, but not drown'd, by the loud brattling; her  
Waved arms, more dazzling with their own born whiteness  
Than the steel her hand held, which she caught up  
From a dead soldier's grasp;—all these things made  
Her seem unto the troops a prophctess  
Of Victory, or Victory herself  
Come down to hail us hers.”

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\* See preface to Henry Taylor's “Philip Van Artaveldt.”



What was the meaning of the fitful irregularity of Byron's poetry, which we have been passing over with praise and blame mingled, and, perhaps, perplexed? Why is it that, with passages of true poetry scattered through all his volumes, he produced no important poem for which his most impassioned admirer can claim the fame of sustained imagination? And why, at last, unable either to quench or to feed the flame of poetry, did he ignominiously retreat into that base production in which, the very instant his better powers failed him, he could exchange them for a vulgar ribaldry and all the vile elements of his nature,—the leprosy rising up in his forehead while standing beside the incense-altar? Was there any mystery in his inequalities? We are told that it was owing to his *genius*. Let me say that weakness is no attribute of genius. Here lies the grand fallacy respecting Byron's mind,—that which was its weakness mistaken for its strength, confounding the violence of his passions with power. Strength is shown by the victory over them, and not by the defeat. Byron deluded himself in these respects, when he should have known that really it is moral and intellectual weakness to be a misanthrope and a sceptic. It is an easy thing to fall into the way of hating the world, and into that confused, blind, stupid state of mind which is called unbelief. The greatest of all weaknesses—the cancer which eat into the very heart of Byron's genius—was his unmitigated *selfishness*. It weakened and wasted him, and perverted and defiled his great endowments, and brought him down to the grave, superannuated, at the age of thirty-six. It was the foul fiend which haunted his existence, tearing him like the wretched demoniacs who dwelt among the tombs and cried out words of blasphemy and defiance.

I am not going now to qualify my language with exceptions and reservations. That has been done, to the best of my ability, scrupulously throughout the lecture; and I am therefore justified in now saying that, taking the whole spirit of Byron's poetry,—its scepticism, its profanity, its blasphemy, its lewdness, its warfare upon religion and social and domestic morals,—it stands the blackest monument of intellectual depravity in the annals of our language. Never had our poetry been so profaned. The same corrupt spirit had been known before; it had disguised itself in one generation in the stately robe of philosophy,—in another it had snatched the myrtle wreath of political freedom; but never before had it worn the garland of poetic inspiration. There had been one phase of infidelity with Bolingbroke and his disciples, and another with Paine and his crew; but the most insidious was that which came from the bright, dark fancy of Byron.

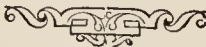
With all the wrong he did, there was mingled, too, a bitter contempt for poor, suffering humanity. Yes; it is true, as he reproached his fellow-mortals, that mankind is prostrate in his fallen nature. Look forth upon the human race, and, behold! they are lying—the wounded, the dying, and the dead—on the vast battle-plain, stricken by their spiritual enemies. But it ill became a poet to steal forth in the night, like one of those wretches that dog the footsteps of an army and prowl over the field fresh with the fight, plundering the expiring soldier, and stripping the bloody raiment from the dead and the dying.

Above all, let me entreat that no one will yield to that poor fallacy which teaches that Byron's infirmities and vice were attributes of genius:—

“ If thou be one whose heart the holy forms  
Of young imagination have kept pure,  
Henceforth be warn'd, and know that pride,  
Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,  
Is littleness; that he who feels contempt  
For any living thing hath faculties  
Which he has never used; that thought, with him,  
Is in its infancy. The man whose eye  
Is ever on himself doth look on one  
The least of Nature's works,—one who might move  
The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds  
Unlawful ever. Oh, be wiser, thou!  
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love;  
True dignity abides with him alone  
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,  
Can still suspect and still revere himself  
In lowliness of heart.” \*

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\* Wordsworth.



## LECTURE XV.

### Wordsworth.

DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF A PROPER APPRECIATION OF CONTEMPORARY GENIUS—CANDOUR RARE IN CRITICISM—CONTROVERSY IN REGARD TO WORDSWORTH'S SCHOOL OF POETRY—COMPARATIVE CRITICISM BETWEEN THE POETRY OF WORDSWORTH AND BYRON—CORRESPONDENCE OF WORDSWORTH'S LIFE WITH THE SPIRIT OF TRUE POETRY—CONTINUITY OF HIS MORAL LIFE—RECOLLECTIONS OF HIS CHILDHOOD—HIS LOVE OF NATURE AND OF MAN—HIS SYMPATHY WITH THE FRENCH REVOLUTION—HIS SECLUSION—COMMUNION WITH HIS BROTHER-POETS—AIM OF HIS CAREER OF AUTHORSHIP—LINES COMPOSED IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF TINTERN ABBEY—"THE EXCURSION"—"SONNET ON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE"—"LINES ON THE DEATH OF MR. FOX"—"TRIBUTE TO A FAVOURITE DOG"—"SIMON LEE"—"STORY OF THE DESERTED COTTAGE"—HIS POLITICAL POEMS—CONCLUSION.

WE are now nearing the close of that glorious registry we have been engaged in examining. When I placed my mind, upon the imaginative point of vision, by the side of Chaucer, the father of English poetry, and looked forward, over the tract of nearly five hundred years, to the noble company of his successors, it was a joy to know that modern times would not be found to bring with them modern degeneracy.

There was encouragement in the assurance that, in quitting the companionship of the mighty men of old, we should not pass into the society of a dwarfish and dwindling race. It is a proud feeling, too, that there is shining upon us not only those rays which travel down from former generations, but the light of the living genius of our own. I have been zealous to display the vast spaces of our English poetry; and especially to show how that domain has been, in successive eras, acquired, whenever a poet of original powers has arisen to discover and reclaim the unknown and neglected region. Remember how we have seen one territory after another thus appropriated and added to our imaginative literature. There was a time when the language was almost without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of its literature. The rude inventions of a barbarian minstrelsy appeared; but soon came Chaucer, the great poet of the fourteenth century. Like the Ancient Mariner, "he was the first that ever burst into that silent sea." It is only necessary to recur to the progress of the English Muse to learn how wrong is the

notion which leads to the belief that the dominion of poetry has reached its utmost confines. The poorest pedantry is that which, not unfrequently, has taught implicit, passive obedience to the authority of a few models, and bound down genius to the servile toil of reiterated imitation. This cannot be: the universe is infinitely wide: and the highest proof is when it holds on high a light which reveals to the world realms which had been unknown as belonging to the sovereignty of imagination. It is the highest attribute of original powers to enlarge the sphere of human sensibility. Think, for instance, how the light of Spenser's imagination at once disclosed to view the untravelled latitudes of his marvellous allegory,—how there soon came the discovery of what may be called the world of Shakspeare,—and how all to whom the spirit and the sounds of our sublimest poetry are dear have been borne, by the imagination of Milton, through regions radiant with angelic light, through the happy home on the infant and sinless earth, and through the dark and dismal dwellings of the lost spirits. It is grand to find our language made subservient to such uses, and ennobling to contemplate the powers with which the most gifted of our race are endowed, employed to enlarge the compass of human thought. In the history of any department of knowledge, it is easier to recognise how this has been accomplished by those whose approved fame time has sanctioned, than to understand and appreciate similar services rendered by contemporary genius. Nor is this strange. Fame is a slow, and often a reluctant, gift. There is a constitutional frailty in us which explains why it is so. The actual presence is an obstacle to that honour which should be rendered to prophet and poet in his own country or his own generation. This must needs be so in poetry above all. When a poet of truly original powers arises, his very originality can be shown only by extending the light of his genius to regions of thought and feeling unilluminated before. Now, too often this is regarded not so much as an enlargement of our ancient and best possessions, but an encroachment upon them, and therefore to be resisted. Old landmarks are changed, and time is not taken to inquire whether the change has increased or contracted the territory. Settled literary opinions and tastes, carelessly acquired at first, are disturbed; and this, it seems to me, is one solution of the antagonist reception which every original poet of the higher order of genius is doomed to encounter from the world. It is a warfare that he must wage,—a conquest to be effected,—happily if controlled by the meek spirit of magnanimity. In criticism, candour, with its comprehensive sympathies, is as rare as bigotry is frequent; and therefore the world has never yet been quick to welcome the greatest poets that have blessed it. The seclusion of Stratford, and

the deeper seclusion of the grave, had long closed over Shakspeare before a thousandth part of his genius was known. The pure and gentle heart of Edmund Spenser wasted beneath neglect and the frustrated hope of his unfinished poem. The indomitable spirit of Milton calmly knew how little he had to expect from his contemporaries. So it has ever been. What else is the reason of that tradition which, when all else that is personal respecting the father of poetry has perished, has come down to us upon the cloudy wings of three thousand years,—the tradition that Homer was a beggar? It has been finely said, “What a glorious gift God bestows upon a nation when he gives them a poet!” It might be added, with a sadder truth, that, when the poet enters upon his mission of gladdening and purifying and spiritualizing the hearts of men, the world is ready with the insult, the scoff, the ridicule, and all the weapons of a stupid and ignorant enmity. There is a blindness blinder than the mole’s; there is a deafness deeper than the adder’s: it is the blindness, the deafness, of literary bigotry!

The character of the poetry which forms the subject of the present lecture has been peculiarly the subject of controversy,—advocated by an earnest, affectionate, and grateful sense of admiration, and assailed by misapprehension, contempt, and a rancorous and reckless hatred. It is not my intention to deal with my subject in a spirit of controversy, for two reasons. I have not done so in any part of the course. I have neither attacked nor defended any one of the poets in a controversial spirit; and surely it could not be worth while to assume the tone of polemics now, when just about to part with you. In the second place, it would be a form of dissension wholly unworthy the poet. The time has gone by for it. The poetry has wrought out its own vindication,—one of the noblest victories, in the annals of literature, of truth and the magnanimous self-possession which is its best attendant, over error, with all its alliance of vulgarity and violence and bitterness. Criticism did its worst; but the citadel on which it beat had its foundation deep set in the rock of nature; and we have lived, and—what is more precious to think of—the poet himself has lived, to see the waters of that insolent tide gradually trickling down; and now all that is left—the froth, the foam, the dirt, heaved up from the bottom, and the drift-wood on the surface—are fast floating out of sight.

There has been expended a great deal of comparative criticism between the poetry of Wordsworth and Byron. During this whole course I have refrained from entering upon comparisons between the poets, because it is a mode of criticism as unsatisfactory as it is easy. There would not be the least difficulty in placing them in comparison and in



contrast, and in describing the true relation between the minds and the aspirations of these two poets; but it would be an uncalled-for deviation from the habit of my lectures. To any who are disposed to measure their worth by comparisons rather than independently, let me only suggest for reflection one significant forewarning of the abiding judgment of posterity,—the final award of fame:—the fact, indisputable by any one, that every succeeding year has worn away some crumbling portion of Lord Byron's splendid popularity, while the majestic splendour of Wordsworth's poetry has steadily been rising to a loftier stature amid the permanent edifices of the great poets of the English language.

It is with some reserve that I allude to the personal history of a living poet; but so truly has the course of Wordsworth's life corresponded with the spirit of his poetry,—so intimate the communion,—that I may avail myself of the autobiographical allusions in his works, and some other authentic materials. The earliest date attached to any of his pieces is the year 1786,—more than half a century ago; and now, when he has passed the solemn limit of seventy years, his imagination—that faculty which age so often quenches—is held in undiminished vigour. It has been a life devoted to the cultivation of the art for its best and most lasting uses,—a self-dedication as complete as any the world has ever witnessed. Among the great English poets, Edmund Spenser perhaps alone presented a career of as sedulous cultivation, equally the existence of one as entirely a poet. It is one of the causes which have given such perfect symmetry to the various periods of Wordsworth's existence,—a realization of one of his imaginative wishes,—that fine aspiration in the first words with which he meets the reader. It is the hope of a fulfilment of that grand law of our moral being which seeks to preserve the sympathy between the successive eras of life,—a law worthy of reflection; for it is a happiness to look back into past and distant years without the desolating sense of thoughts and feelings swept away by time. It is a happy thing for meditation, standing on the promontory of the present, to feel the air rising from the shadowy waters of the past and sweeping on to sink to rest upon the dim waves of the future. Injury is done to the health of our moral being when the principle of its continuity is broken. Feelings that were meant to be cherished are suffered to perish. This is worse than the work of time; for that which time should only ripen withers and runs to waste. It is the mischief of custom, and not of time; and thus one period of our life is alienated from another. The connection between them is broken, and former days are forgotten or despised. Childish things must, indeed, be put away with childhood; but too

often worse than childish things are put in their stead. The uncalculating, unsuspecting fervour of youth, instead of being chastened into a manly fashion of the same feeling, is transformed into selfishness and distrust. Young enthusiasm does not grow into a mature and steadier spirit, but is changed into apathy, or the worse condition,—the habit of weak and morbid ridicule of all that is elevated and impassioned. To take an instance of two periods of life, standing in close connection, and yet often lamentably destitute of that natural piety which should bind them together for happy and salutary meditation and memory:—the ardent devotion of the lover evaporating in matrimony, when he settles down, as the phrase is, into the married man. From the cool region into which he has passed, he looks back upon his former self with something of contemptuous commiseration, disowning the chivalry, the deference, the adoration, as so much obsolete delusion. In Byron's fine poetic phrase, "a change comes o'er the spirit of his dream." He is a different being; his friends scarcely recognise him, and his wife hardly knows the man. I speak of this only as an example of this unnatural decomposition of the feelings of different periods of life, as one of the most striking and most dangerous. It was the poet's purpose to proclaim a law of our moral nature which gives harmony and consistency to life amid all its inevitable vicissitudes. But the lessons poetry teaches must be simple, strong, and touching: they must be imaginative. It was important, too, that the moral should be illustrated by some feeling at once pure and universal,—something all might sympathize with; and, accordingly, he has selected that phenomenon in the heavens which even the feeblest sense of the beauty of nature is touched with:—

" My heart leaps up when I behold  
     A rainbow in the sky !  
 So was it when my life began ;  
 So is it now I am a man ;  
 So be it when I shall grow old,  
     Or let me die !  
 The child is father of the man ;  
 And I could wish my days to be  
 Bound each to each by natural piety."

The days of Wordsworth's life have been thus bound together by a natural piety; and hence the matchless symmetry of his career,—at once a cause and an effect of his well-disciplined genius. His childhood was spent on the borders of that romantic region in the North of England where he was to find the happy home of his manhood and old age,—

the blue outline of the Cumberland Mountains present to his sight,—a lofty and shadowy region for his young imagination to travel to.

The emotions of the early years of his life have been rescued from oblivion with a power which manifests both the depth of his childhood's impressions and the strength of his imagination in reviving them. I think that every one who has ever reflected on the movements of his own mind must have realized the difficulty of marking the boundary of his memory when it journeys back into past and early years, and at the same time be conscious of the flitting of dim recollections of childhood,—perhaps, after all, the most thoughtful period of our whole life. Feelings will often pass across the mind, coming you cannot tell whence, but only that they come from far away, from the dim distance of childhood. Which of its visionary realms could poetry more happily expatiate in? When the effort is made by a juvenile writer of verses to clothe his impulses in language, it is a weak expression of feeling which yet may be in all respects fit for poetry. But that fitness becomes beautifully apparent when a mature imagination is able to redeem feelings which, in almost all cases, perish entirely, or vanish into the most mysterious chambers of the memory,—such shadowy things that you can scarce tell whether they are recollections, or fancies, or dreams. The more you reflect on these things, the more you will appreciate the imaginative energy necessary to reanimate the impressions received in early life and give them a poetic shape. There is one of Wordsworth's small pieces which exemplifies this power of recalling some of the most evanescent feelings which could have flitted across a boy's mind. He remembers a distant day, bright both with its blue sky and with boyhood's buoyant happiness,—

“One of those heavenly days that cannot die,”—

on which he sallied forth upon a boyish enterprise of foraging upon the hazel-trees. The eagerness of his hope, the luxury of animal delight, are vividly remembered, but not more so than the rapid transition of feeling,—one of those sudden reactions common to the quick heart of childhood, which rises from its unexpected sense of pain to an exquisite sympathy, by which imagination spiritualizes the insensate world of nature :—

“O'er the pathless rocks I forced my way  
Until, at length, I came to one dear nook  
Unvisited, where not a broken bough  
Droop'd with its wither'd leaves, ungracious sign  
Of devastation, but the hazels rose  
Tall and erect, with milk-white clusters hung,—

A virgin scene ! A little while I stood,  
 Breathing with such suppression of the heart  
 As joy delights in, and, with wise restraint  
 Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed  
 The banquet ; or beneath the trees I sat  
 Among the flowers, and with the flowers I play'd : —  
 A temper known to those, who, after long  
 And weary expectation, have been blest  
 With sudden happiness beyond all hope.  
 Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves  
 The violets of five seasons reappear  
 And fade unseen by any human eye :  
 Where fairy water breaks do murmur on  
 For ever ; and I saw the sparkling foam,  
 And with my cheek on one of those green stones  
 That, fleeced with moss, beneath the shady trees,  
 Lay round me, scatter'd like a flock of sheep,  
 I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,  
 In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay  
 Tribute to ease, and, of its joy secure,  
 The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,  
 Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones  
 And on the vacant air. Then up I rose,  
 And dragg'd to earth both branch and bough with crash  
 And merciless ravage, and the shady nook  
 Of hazels, and the green mossy bower,  
 Deform'd and sullied, patiently gave up  
 Their quiet being : and, unless I now  
 Confound my present feelings with the past,  
 Even then, when from the bower I turn'd away  
 Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,  
 I felt a sense of pain when I beheld  
 The silent trees and the intruding sky.  
 Then, dearest Maiden ! move along these shades  
 In gentleness of heart ; with gentle hand  
 Touch ; for there is a spirit in the woods."

The foundations of Wordsworth's mind were thus laid in communion  
 with the grand and beautiful scenery of his native region :—

" He had felt the power  
 Of nature, and already was prepared  
 By his intense conceptions, to receive  
 Deeply the lesson deep of love which he  
 Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught  
 To feel intensely, cannot but receive."

Conjoined with this,—the first virgin passion of a soul

" Communing with the glorious universe,"—

was his studious, reverential communion with the pages of his great predecessors,—the masters of English poetry,—and chiefly of Milton. Another element of his genius began very early to display itself,—his ever-active sympathy with his fellow-men. Deep as his passion for nature has always been, the living nature of mankind has been dearer to him; and it is part of the history of his mind that he hoped greatly and enthusiastically for the cause of social and political regeneration, when for a short season, at the close of the last century, the whole earth

“The beauty wore of promise,—that which sets  
The budding rose above the rose full blown.”

His young spirit, which had fed upon its lonely musings in the mountains and its poetic sympathies with the souls of the dead poets, was prompt to change them for the more active fellow-feeling with mankind struggling for freedom:—

“Farewell, farewell! the heart that lives alone,  
Housed in a dream, at distance from the kind!  
Such happiness, wherever it is known,  
Is to be pitied, for 't is surely blind.”

Full of hope, Wordsworth passed over into France in the early part of the French Revolution, and was an eye-witness of some of its terrific commotions. His heart was with the down-trodden people, and he was elated with the pure enthusiasm which trusted in the virtues of what proved a worthless cause. He witnessed the wretchedness that had been wrought by tyranny; and, young and ardent, he over-estimated the restraining influences on the people's vengeance. One of the darkest reproaches which rests on the Revolution of France is the wrong done to the eternal cause of freedom; for, when at the present day we seek to appreciate the sufferings which first heaved that vast commotion, there rise up, intercepting the view, the blood-boltered spectres of the hideous agencies in that drama. The sympathies of Wordsworth were with only the pure elements of the cause, especially because of what he witnessed in the miseries of the peasantry. The incident is told, that, walking one day, in the neighbourhood of Orleans, in company with a citizen of France, fervid with republicanism, they came suddenly on the spectacle of a girl of seventeen or eighteen years old, hunger-bitten and wasted to a meagre shadow, knitting in a dejected drooping way, whilst to her arm was attached by a rope the horse, equally famished, that earned the miserable support of her family. The spectacle told, in one instant, the whole story of wretchedness; and seizing Wordsworth by the arm, his companion exclaimed, “Dear English friend, brother, from



a nation of freemen! *That* it is that is the curse of our people, in their widest division; and to cure this it is, as well as to maintain our work against the kings of the earth, that blood must be shed, and tears must flow, for many years to come."

The atmosphere of the Revolution grew more and more murky. France was stricken with the worst of Egypt's plagues: benighted in moral darkness, it was visited with the pestilence of blood throughout the land. Wordsworth sought the homeward road to England,—the innocent delusion of his enthusiasm scattered, but his heart unembittered by disappointment, and its pulse of genuine freedom beating as strongly as ever. Whilst travelling back to his native region, in crossing the sands of one of the great estuaries, he chanced to inquire of a horseman who overtook him, "Is there any news?" and to hear the tidings, "Yes: Robespierre has perished." Forgetful of the returning tide coming in over the waste of sands, he stopped to utter a heartfelt thanksgiving for that vindication of justice and outraged liberty.

When Wordsworth retired to dwell in the mountain-district of the North of England, there was in the spirit of his seclusion nothing of a morbid solitariness. It was a retirement sought as favourable not only to the genial and studious culture of his endowments, but also to the most propitious intercourse with his fellow-men. There was nothing of that faint and false-hearted flight from society of which genius has sometimes been guilty; but retirement was chosen as the vantage-ground of imagination and meditative truth, and in his solitude he has nursed his heart in a quick sensibility to all healthy sympathies with his country and mankind. His plan of life has been kept inviolate: his home is still among the mountains; his heart is with humanity the wide world over;—

"He murmurs near the running brooks  
A music sweeter than their own.  
He is retired as noontide dew,  
Or fountain in a noonday grove:  
And you must love him, ere to you  
He will seem worthy of your love.  
The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has view'd,  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude."

Wordsworth has been fortunate in the cordial communion with Coleridge, and Southey, and Lamb, and in the friendship of Sir Walter Scott and the patriarch of contemporary poets,—Rogers. He has been happy, too, in the intellectual female sympathy he has enjoyed in the

bosom of his own family. This appears not only in his delicate allusions to the members of his household, but from a passage in Mr. Southey's *Life of Cowper*, plainly alluding to Wordsworth. After speaking of the valuable influence on Cowper's mind of his intimacy with Mrs. Unwin and Lady Austin, Southey adds, "Were I to say that a poet finds his best advisers among his female friends, it would be speaking from my own experience, and the greatest poet of the age would confirm it by his."

The aim of all Wordsworth's endeavours in poetry, as he has stated it, has been that they should be fitted for filling permanently a station, however humble, in the literature of his country. It is remarkable that in not a line can be detected any lowering of that aim to the secondary objects of authorship: no trace of mercenary motive, no paltering with artificial tastes, no sacrifice of truth and nature for the gain of notoriety, no dallying with fashion, betray a faltering in the purpose to which he devoted himself. This demanded extraordinary self-possession—all the fortitude, the magnanimity of genius—to preserve its composure. He moved on fearlessly, following the call of his own imagination; and it is a grand thing now to behold the young and ingenuous, the older and thoughtful, vying with each other in rendering to him the tribute of a grateful admiration.

On the poet's return from the Continent, the love of nature, which had been coeval with his early consciousness, was undiminished. He carried it along with him in his inmost heart, amid all the uncongenial scenes he had been a witness to. There are some admirable lines of his, familiar to every student of Wordsworth's poetry, composed in the neighbourhood of Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the river Wye: they finely represent the change from the passionate to the meditative love of nature,—the maturing of the emotion of sentient boyhood to that of thoughtful manhood. But I refer to them because they show how the beauteous forms of the external world revisited his memory and his feelings even in unpropitious circumstances,—doubtless amid the tumultuous agitations of the Parisian mobs, the frenzy of the factions, the waves of a ruthless multitude beating against the ancient palace of their kings, the convulsion of every resting-place of society, the unnatural ferocity of revolutionary women, and the boundless vengeance of the metropolis, with the sympathetic restlessness of the provinces. Amid all this, the poet's heart was gladdened by a return of a memory of the emotion which some placid scene had inspired him with: —

"Oh! how oft,  
In darkness, and amid the many shapes

Of joyless daylight, when the fretful stir  
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,  
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,—  
 How oft in spirit have I turn'd to thee,  
 O sylvan Wye ! Thou wanderer through the woods,  
 How often has my spirit turn'd to thee ! ”

He came forth from amid the cloudy, stormy elements of society to render the unwearied service of a worshipper of nature :—

“ I know that nature never did betray  
 The heart that loved her : 't is her privilege,  
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
 From joy to joy : for she can so inform  
 The mind that is within us, so impress  
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 Our cheerful faith that all which we behold  
 Is full of blessings.”

No poet has ever yet so devoted his imagination to the study of the face of nature as Wordsworth. He has communed with her in all her moods, and contemplated the ever-varying expression of her countenance. It would transcend even the expansive limits of these lectures to illustrate his descriptive poetry, and I can only endeavour to give some idea of the spirit of it. In the last lecture I had occasion to show how dangerous the love of nature may become if perverted into a sentimental and insidious materialism. In the heart of Wordsworth the passionate love of nature has not been so betrayed. It is coupled with the faith that infinite wisdom has so formed the earth, the elements, and the physical heavens, that the soul, during its abode in its mortal tenement, can gather, from all that meets the senses, food for its noble faculties :—

“ The glorious habit by which sense is made  
 Subservient still to moral purposes,  
 Auxiliar to divine.”

Deep and habitual as is Wordsworth's devotion to nature, it is no idolatry of what is material. The worlds of the eye and the ear, like the senses that observed them, are subject to decay ; and it is not the character of his genius to pause upon what is perishable. He never fails to impress on us that the forms of nature, loved as they are, are fugitive, valueless, except when contemplated in their relation to man and to his Maker ; that the earth—the dear, green earth—will darken in the

absence of imagination. Nay, more : rising to the height of as lofty aspiration as ever was conceived, either in poetry or philosophy, he proclaims the awful truth that the universe itself—the material universe—is a hollow shell, from which the ear of faith alone can hear mysterious murmurings of eternity. This moral is expounded by means of one of the finest images that ever entered into the heart of poet to conceive,—beautiful in itself and sublime in its application :—

“ I have seen  
A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract  
Of inland ground, applying to his ear  
The convolutions of a smooth-lipp'd shell,  
To which, in silence hush'd, his very soul  
Listen'd intensely, and his countenance soon  
Brighten'd with joy ; for, murmuring from within,  
Were heard sonorous cadences, whereby  
To his belief the monitor express'd  
Mysterious union with its native sea.  
Even such a shell the universe itself  
Is to the ear of Faith.”

There is another passage in the “Excursion,” bearing on this subject,—one of those sublime strains with which that poem abounds, and loftier than aught that English poetry has known since the age of Milton. It is an apostrophe to the Deity, and, while it tells that the universe shall perish, also tells the one great element of its glory :—

“ Thou who didst wrap the cloud  
Of infancy around us, that thyself  
Therein, with our simplicity, a while  
Might'st hold on earth communion undisturb'd,  
Who, from the anarchy of dreaming sleep,  
Or from its deathlike void, with punctual care  
And touch as gentle as the morning light,  
Restor'st us daily to the powers of sense  
And reason's stedfast rule,—thou, thou alone  
Art everlasting, and the blessed Spirits  
Which thou includest, as the Sea her waves,  
For adoration thou endur'st.—  
This universe shall pass away—a work  
Glorious ! because the shadow of thy might,  
A step, or link, for intercourse with thee ! ”

I cite these passages to show the principles of Wordsworth's descriptive poetry,—his love of nature how spiritual ; for, amid all his admiration of the world of sense, the undying incorporeal power, the soul, preserves its undaunted sovereignty. So far from suffering his profound sense of the beauty of the material world to entangle his genius in the meshes of

materialism, his rapt imagination looks on all the glories of the universe as but a poor substitute for what the soul may know in the imperial palace of its home with God. In the mighty effort of his imagination, the greatest ode in the English language, the ode on the intimations of immortality, dwelling upon the heavenly innocence of childhood,—a feeling in harmony with the Saviour's words; and then, raising the human soul above its material life, he has cast a ray of poetry upon that the most impenetrable of all mysteries,—the origin of the soul before its lodgment in the body. Thus, sublimely asserting our immortality, he heeds this earth as no more than ministering to the spirit that has wandered from some better home into this mortal life:—

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
 The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
   Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
   And cometh from afar.  
   Not in entire forgetfulness,  
   And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory, do we come  
   From God, who is our home.  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
   Upon the growing *boy*;  
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows;  
   He sees it in his joy.  
 The *youth* who daily farther from the east  
 Must travel still is nature's priest,  
   And by the vision splendid  
   Is on the way attended.  
 At length the *man* perceives it die away  
 And fade into the light of coming day.  
 Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
 And even with something of a mother's mind,  
   And no unworthy aim,  
 The homely nurse doth all she can  
 To make her foster-child—her inmate, man—  
 Forget the glories he hath known,  
 And that imperial palace whence he came.”

The purpose which the poet proposes to himself, in his descriptive poetry, was to show how the mind and the external world are fitted to each other, and to accomplish this by rescuing from neglect the unheeded impressions perpetually made upon us, and giving us a distinct consciousness of them when shaped by poetic imagination. Wordsworth's poetry abounds with manifestations of the deep impressions he



receives from slight hints, such as occur to any of us in daily life; and it is this which makes a genial admiration of his writings so precious an acquisition. It is a companionship which clings to humanity in all its paths. Once open your heart to it, and its benignant light will be shed on your domestic hearth, upon all your intercourse with your fellow-men, upon your civic responsibilities to your country, and the sublimer relations in which man is placed. Feelings that are apt to run to waste ripen beneath the influence of his imagination, hope is cherished, and the best impulses confirmed, the noblest aspirations sustained. Hence comes that ardent affectionate gratitude for moral and intellectual obligations which, from so many hearts, is the silent tribute to the aged poet:—

“Beauty—a living Presence of the earth,  
 Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms  
 Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed  
 From earth's materials—waits upon my steps;  
 Pitches her tents before me as I move,  
 An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves  
 Elysian, Fortunate Fields,—like those of old,  
 Sought in the Atlantic main:—why should they be  
 A history only of departed things,  
 Or a mere fiction of what never was?  
 For the discerning intellect of Man,  
 When wedded to this goodly universe  
 In love and holy passion, shall find these  
 A simple produce of the common day.

By words

Which speak of nothing more than what we are  
 Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep  
 Of death, and win the vacant and the vain  
 To nobler raptures.”

It is this purpose which has led Wordsworth to consecrate by his imagination things which poetry never shone upon before. You will find in this way a dignity and grace given to feelings which before were perhaps deemed unworthy a second thought. For instance, it is hardly possible for any one to pass along the vacant, noiseless street of a city at very early morn, before the population is stirring,—to move amid the sleeping power of a large city,—without a sense of the tranquillity of the moment. The emotion is a natural, a common, and a simple one, but it is indefinite and evanescent, and therefore needs the imaginative power of a true poet to give it impressiveness without spoiling its simplicity. Wordsworth once gazed upon sleeping London, and the feeling I have just been speaking of is now a thing registered for ever in

poetry, in the exquisite expression of deep repose which he has given in his famous sonnet on Westminster Bridge :—

“ Earth has not anything to show more fair.  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty ;  
This city now doth like a garment wear  
The beauty of the morning ; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields and to the sky,  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
Never did sun more beautifully steep,  
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill ;  
Ne’er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep.  
The river glideth at his own sweet will ;  
Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep,  
And all that mighty heart is lying still.”

To take one other illustration ; most persons have, I imagine, on looking on the placid surface of a pure and transparent sheet of water, felt a sort of thoughtless impulse, often uttering a sportive wish, to plunge into it. It would hardly be supposed that this blind impulse was susceptible of poetry or of an imaginative solution :—

“ Why stand we gazing on the sparkling brine  
With wonder, smit with its transparency,  
And all enraptured with its purity ?  
Because the unstain’d, the clear, the crystalline,  
Have ever in them something of benign ;  
Whether in gem, in water, or in sky,  
A sleeping infant’s brow, or wakeful eye  
Of a young maiden, only not divine :  
Scarcely the hand forbears to dip its palm  
For beverage drawn as from a mountain well ;  
Temptation centres in the liquid calm ;  
Our daily raiment seems no obstacle  
To instantaneous plunging in deep sea  
And revelling in long embrace with thee.”

Another form of poetic communion with nature is that which discovers a sympathy between the appearances of the outer world and emotions stirring in the heart. This is another great element of Wordsworth’s poetry. On one occasion, having just read that the death of a celebrated and very popular British statesman was hourly looked for, he walks forth in the evening of a stormy day, and what he beholds and feels is a type of both the agitated spirit of the poet and his

countrymen, and of the steady, placid light of a meditative resignation :—

“ Loud is the vale : the voice is up  
 With which she speaks when storms are gone,—  
 A mighty unison of streams !  
 Of all her voices one !

“ Loud is the vale : this inland depth  
 In peace is roaring like the sea ;  
 Yon star upon the mountain-top  
 Is listening quietly.

“ Sad was I, even to pain deprest ;  
 Importunate and heavy load !  
 The comforter hath found me here  
 Upon this lonely road ;

“ And many thousands now are sad,  
 Wait the fulfilment of their fear ;  
 For he must die who was their stay,  
 Their glory disappear.

“ A power is passing from the earth  
 To breathless nature’s dark abyss ;  
 But, when the great and good depart,  
 What is it more than this ?—

“ That man, who is from God sent forth,  
 Doth yet again to God return ?  
 Such ebb and flow must ever be :  
 Then wherefore should we mourn ? ”

Passing from inanimate nature, I must hasten rapidly along the far-reaching line of Wordsworth’s poetic sympathies, entering next into the range of the lower orders of animal life. The tenderness of the human heart for the dumb creatures which surround us is a sentiment as pure as it is appropriate. Neglected, it leads to cruelty worse than brutish ; but, on the other hand, in may be overwrought into a species of sentimental misanthropy. When one of Sir Walter Scott’s dearest pet dogs died, he caused it to be buried in his garden,—his children weeping over the remains of their mute playmate, and he, as Mrs. Lockhart remembered, smoothing down the turf with one of the saddest expressions she had ever seen on his face. When afterwards the noblest and most celebrated of his favourites died, he caused a stone and inscription to be placed, near the gate of Abbotsford, over the dog’s grave. When Lord Byron’s dog expired, he set up a conspicuous monument in the garden at Newstead Abbey, with an elaborate poetic inscription, recording the virtues of the dead dog in an affected strain of

abuse and hatred of living men. The poet, moreover, by his will, directed his own body to be buried near his faithful favourite. Now, every one must feel that this is a gross perversion of a feeling which might be chastened to better uses. The moment you find appropriated to the brute creation the obsequies which the heart hallows for man alone, you recoil instinctively from it, as either involving a heartless mockery or as degrading to humanity. The affection towards the creatures beneath us in the scale of being may be made to flow in a deep and true channel, as this tribute to a favourite dog well shows:—

“ Lie here, without a record of thy worth,  
 Beneath a covering of the common earth !  
 It is not from unwillingness to praise,  
 Or want of love, that here no stone we raise.  
 More thou deserv’st ; but *this* man gives to man,  
 Brother to brother :—*this* is all we can.  
 Yet they to whom thy virtues made thee dear  
 Shall find thee through all changes of the year :  
 This oak points out thy grave ; the silent tree  
 Will gladly stand a monument of thee.  
 I grieved for thee, and wish’d thy end were past,  
 And willingly have laid thee here at last :  
 For thou hadst lived till everything that cheers,  
 In thee, had yielded to the weight of years ;  
 Extreme old age had wasted thee away  
 And left thee but the glimmering of the day.  
 Thy ears were deaf, and feeble were thy knees ;  
 I saw thee stagger in the summer breeze,  
 Too weak to stand against its sportive breath,  
 And ready for the gentlest stroke of death.  
 It came, and we were glad : yet tears were shed ;  
 Both man and woman wept when thou wert dead ;—  
 Not only for a thousand thoughts, that were  
 Old household thoughts, in which thou hadst thy share,  
 But for some precious boons vouchsafed to thee,  
 Found scarcely anywhere in like degree !  
 For love that comes to all—the holy sense,  
 Best gift of God—in thee was most intense.  
 A chain of heart, a feeling of the mind,  
 A tender sympathy, which did thee bind  
 Not only to us men, but to thy kind.  
 Yea, for thy fellow-brutes in thee we saw  
 The soul of love, love’s intellectual law :  
 Hence, if we wept, it was not done in shame ;  
 Our tears from passion and from reason came,  
 And therefore shalt thou be an honour’d name.”

There is a beautiful expression of Wordsworth's meditative fancy inspired by musing over some gold and silver fishes in a vase, which I allude to, however, rather because of a higher inspiration prompted by the slight hint,—the restoration of them to freedom. It tells his deep sympathy with the liberty of all the mere animal creation :—

“ Who can divine what impulses from God  
Reach the caged lark, within a town-abode,  
From his poor inch or two of daisied sod ?  
Oh, yield him back his privilege ! No sea  
Swells like the bosom of a man set free ;  
A wilderness is rich with liberty.  
Roll on, ye spouting whales, who die or keep  
Your independence in the fathomless deep !  
Spread, tiny nautilus, the living sail ;  
Dive at thy choice, or brave the freshening gale.  
If unproved the ambitious eagle mount  
Sunward to seek the daylight in its fount,  
Bays, gulfs, and oceans, Indian width, shall be,  
Till the world perishes, a field for thee.”

But the noblest dedication of Wordsworth's genius has been in his communion with his fellow-men,—a sympathy as expanded as ever filled the human heart, comprehensive of the highest and the lowliest of the race, and shedding a glory on all conditions of humanity :—

“ T is nature's law  
That none, the meanest of created things,  
Of forms created the most vile and brute,  
The dullest or most noxious, should exist  
Divorced from good,—a spirit and pulse of good,—  
A life and soul to every mode of being  
Inseparably link'd. Then be assured  
That least of all can aught that ever own'd  
The heaven-regarding eye and front sublime  
Which man is born to, sink, howe'er depress'd,  
So low as to be scorn'd without a sin,  
Without offence to God, cast out of view,  
Like the dry remnant of a garden-flower  
Whose seeds are shed, or as an implement  
Worn out and useless.  
No ! man is dear to man ; the poorest poor  
Long for some moments in a weary life  
When they can know and feel that they have been  
Themselves the fathers and the dealers out  
Of some small blessings, have been kind to such  
As needed kindness, for this single cause :—  
That we have all of us one human heart.”



This principle is the great moral element of Wordsworth's poetry,—the sameness of the human heart. I am painfully conscious of the injury I am doing to it by these hurried comments. He has vindicated the sensibilities of mankind in humble life, and, by showing their susceptibility to kindness, has fostered the natural love between man and man. He thus silences a common plea of selfishness, in treating the story of the ingratitude of the poor as a thing only heard of at a distance. This is the fine moral of the little ballad of Simon Lee, closing with these stanzas :—

- “ My gentle reader, I perceive  
How patiently you 've waited ;  
And now I fear that you expect  
Some tale will be related.
- “ O reader ! had you in your mind  
Such stores as silent thought can bring,—  
O gentle reader ! you would find  
A tale in everything.
- “ What more I have to say is short,  
And you must kindly take it :  
It is no tale ; but, should you think,  
Perhaps a tale you 'll make it.
- “ One summer day I chanced to see  
This old man, doing all he could  
To unearth the root of an old tree,  
A stump of rotten wood.
- “ The mattock totter'd in his hand ;  
So vain was his endeavour,  
That at the root of the old tree  
He might have work'd for ever.
- “ ‘ You 're overtask'd, good Simon Lee ;  
Give me your tool,' to him I said ;  
And, at the word, right gladly he  
Receiv'd my proffer'd aid.
- “ I struck, and with a single blow  
The tangled root I sever'd,  
At which the poor old man so long  
And vainly had endeavour'd.
- “ The tears into his eyes were brought,  
And thanks and praises seem'd to run  
So fast out of his heart, I thought  
They never would have done.
- “ I 've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds  
With coldness still returning :  
Alas ! the gratitude of men  
Hath oftener left me mourning.”

In Wordsworth's highly-cultivated affection for human nature, of course, is comprehended that reverence of womanly nature which we have observed as an element in the genius of all the great English poets. It is part of his comprehensive scheme for elevating and purifying humanity, to throw the light of his imagination upon the meek majesty of the female heart, its faithfulness, its fortitude, its heroism. What can be more touchingly beautiful than the account of a woman's slowly-wasting spirit, in the story of the "Deserted Cottage," in the first book of the "Excursion"? The sanity of Wordsworth's genius admits of no romantic exaggeration or rapid sentimentality on this subject. While it is his delight to show how divine a thing a woman may be made, he regards her moving in the orbit of domestic life, not as enshrined by a superstitious chivalry, but the being that God gave because it was not good for man to be alone. It is a worthy and no light effort of poetic genius to take from the extravagances of romance all that is attractive, and to blend it with the daily household worth of woman, and, thus preserving its beauty, to reveal the spiritual and the practical which in their harmony make up the perfection of female loveliness.

I had it much at heart to treat of Wordsworth's political poems, and to show how valuable a use they might subserve in elevating and chastening public sentiment. But the subject is too fine a one to be injured by such hurried discussion as I would now be compelled to give it. Let me only, in evidence of his large-hearted sympathy with our institutions, repeat an unpublished sonnet, composed on reading an account of what he charitably calls some misdoings in our land :—

"Men of the Western World! in Fate's dark book  
Whence this opprobrious leaf of dire portent?  
Think ye your British ancestors forsook  
Their narrow isle, for outrage provident?  
Think ye they fled restraint they ill could brook,  
To give in their descendants freer vent  
And wider range to passions turbulent,  
To mutual tyranny a deadlier look?  
'Nay,' said a voice more soft than zephyr's breath;  
'Dive through the stormy surface of the flood  
To the great current flowing underneath;  
Think on the countless springs of silent good;  
So shall the truth be known and understood,  
And thy grieved spirit brighten strong in faith.' "

I had hoped to present the subject of this lecture with all the care due to a poet whose fame, not yet sanctioned by time, is therefore vaguely appreciated. But circumstances far beyond my control have

so embarrassed the requisite preparation, that I have been constrained to presume upon your indulgence in the hasty and very inadequate suggestions which have constituted this evening's lecture.

It has been my unaffected desire that this course of lectures should be conducted with as little obtrusion of the lecturer personally as possible. It is the *cause* which I have been anxious to impress you with, leaving him to whom you have listened to be recognised as scarce more than a mere voice. A few words were given to personal considerations in first meeting you ; a few more may be indulged in now parting from you. I then stated the principles on which this literary enterprise was undertaken,—a duty to this community arising from my position in it. It was not consistent with either that duty or my inclination to court a reluctant attendance or solicit it as a favour. Taking no step of that sort, and, in these times of indiscriminate and exaggerated puffing, avoiding all the machinery of extrinsic influences, it was my resolution that the fate of this course, be it what it might, should be its real fate. I thought it no more than my right distinctly to say so, believing that so we would understand each other the better. It is my wish now to say that the feeling then asserted, so far from hindering, has best promoted, a deep sense of gratefulness for the kindness I have met with. It never entered into my thoughts that my duty to offer this course brought the least obligation upon you to attend it. What claims had I upon that patience which has been so bountifully bestowed on me ? What assurance was there that these lectures could or would be conducted in a way that would be satisfactory to you ? I well know the inconvenience, the restraint, the interference with other engagements and habits, which your attendance here must have subjected you to ; and, when I look back and think that this has been so for sixteen successive weeks, my heart leaps up with pride that a subject so purely imaginative should have thus won your attention, and with gratitude for the kind, friendly, and indulgent feelings which the interest of that subject has been the means of extending to me personally. This course has been protracted longer than appears to me desirable ; each lecture, too, has exceeded its due limits. Conscious of this, it has been the more gratifying to experience your consideration for me in restraining all symptoms of impatience. No one can be more sensible than I am of the deficiencies of the course, resulting from two very ample though widely-different causes—the superabundance of the materials and the inability to do the subject the justice which is its due. It is unavailing, however, now to dwell upon those deficiencies, and I would rather turn to the hope suggested by them—necessarily an indefinite hope—of

entering with you, on some future occasion, into some of those regions of our literature of which thus far we have in not a few instances only touched upon the frontiers. In the mean time I can bear away the happy recollection of having witnessed the power which true poetry exerts over the best of our intellectual and moral sympathies, for I know that the hearts of young and old have kindled here with the sound of the noble strains uttered by our English imagination. All that has reached me respecting these lectures has been kindness—unqualified kindness,—inspiring this feeling above all others :—an anxiety to bring them far nearer than has been done to the ideal of what might merit such acknowledgments. It is, therefore, with entire sincerity that for the last words to pass between us I appropriate that simple stanza, the very voice of gratefulness, repeated once already this evening :—

“ I ’ve heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds  
With coldness still returning :  
Alas ! the gratitude of men  
Hath oftener left me mourning.”



# MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS

ON

## ENGLISH POETRY.

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### ESSAY I.

#### English Sonnets.

IT is matter of familiar observation, that the success of literary productions is sensibly dependent on the forms in which they are presented. In the domain of English poetry, there is a section to which justice has not been done: its quality is not held in very high repute, and the title to it is regarded as somewhat doubtful. I refer to that form of metrical composition which is denominated the Sonnet. To prove that it has not found favour always even in the eyes of those who have cultivated a taste for other forms of poetry, I would ask them whether, when they have met with its modest structure, they have not generally passed it carelessly by. Besides, in the minds of those who do not entirely neglect it, there may be detected a peculiar feeling, aptly to be described as unkindly; they regard it not with the look that a man gives to his own kin and countrymen, but with that which is cast coldly and doubtingly upon a stranger or foreigner. While the sonnet is read, an *un-English* feeling is found to be creeping about the heart, and the fancy is filled unconsciously with thoughts of Petrarch and images of Laura and the Vaucluse. While its melody is falling on the ear, we are too often overtaken with a kind of misgiving that we are listening to the rich music of, indeed, our own mother-tongue, but tuned to a strange note; that we hear its glorious words uttered through a foreign instrument. This is not as it should be. The Muse of England should not stand a suppliant or a vassal anywhere. She holds in her own right, or she holds not at all. So far as literature is concerned, we are, by our calling, guardsmen of English rights and English merits; and, as the form of poetry in question seems to be regarded as not having yet worked out its independence, I mean to try to undertake its vindication. I proclaim



at the outstep that we acknowledge no allegiance—own no homage—to the Italian. Our literary territory is held absolutely, or it had better be relinquished entirely. There is too much Saxon blood in our veins to bide content on a divided soil or under a feudal tenure. It may be shown that the sonnet is a form of poetry fairly introduced in the literature of England, fully sustained, and now, without reserve or qualification, by the law of letters it is our own. I propose, therefore, to say a word for our English title and our English fame in this province of poesy.

Before advancing further, the looseness in the acceptance of the term “sonnet,” in consequence of its application to several different forms of poetry, demands some attempt to ascertain its true use, or, at least, to give it some precision. The most obvious property, which is common to the sonnets of all countries, is its limitation to fourteen lines. With the exception of some of the earliest English sonnets, and those of not much merit, which extended to eighteen lines, this may be said to be universally true. It is composed of four parts, two quatrains and two tercines, which are usually indicated by the typography in the foreign sonnets, but not in the English. Rhyme is also an essential property, and it is to it that the different varieties of the sonnet have reference: the lines are of equal length and the measure iambic. The form which is considered as especially entitled to the name is that which is framed after the Italian sonnet,—the Petrarchean model. In this the rhymes are repeated at certain intervals so as to produce a recurrence of the same closing sound; and it is this property which seems to suggest the origin of the name itself. The arrangement is such that, in fourteen lines, there are but five, and sometimes not more than four, several rhymes. I am a little fearful I am making myself disagreeable by the technicalities of prosody. By means of a specimen, I may accomplish my wish of conveying an idea of the general structure of this variety of the sonnet much better and certainly more agreeably. In quoting, with this view, Mr. Wordsworth’s sonnet composed upon Westminster Bridge, I did not intend to be diverted from the mere consideration of its metrical character. I cannot, however, refrain from asking the reader to recall his feelings when he has happened to pass along the streets of a city yet in its slumbers; and, unless our own deceive us, he will find, we think, an echo to them in the following specimen of the metre of the sonnet:—

“Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty.  
This city now doth like a garment wear

The beauty of the morning ; silent, bare,  
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
 Open unto the fields and to the sky,  
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
 Never did sun more beautifully steep,  
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill ;  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will :  
 Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep,  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still ! ”

In this form the poem is cast by those who have implicitly revered the ancient landmarks. It is the most usual form of the Spanish and Portuguese as well as the Italian sonnet. The English poets, with Shakspeare as a leader, have, with a characteristic temper, claimed greater freedom. This appears in several different structures of the poem, in which the variety is effected in some by a different distribution of the rhymes, and in others by increasing the number of them to six and seven, but not attaching them throughout to consecutive lines. The following, selected from the same poet in order to avoid distracting attention to other points of comparison, may serve as specimens of some of these varieties :—

“ The shepherd, looking eastward, softly said,  
 ‘ Bright is thy veil, O moon, as thou art bright ! ’  
 Forthwith that little cloud, in ether spread  
 And penetrated all with tender light,  
 She east away, and show’d her fulgent head  
 Uncover’d,—dazzling the beholder’s sight,  
 As if to vindicate her beauty’s right,—  
 Her beauty thoughtlessly disparaged.  
 Meanwhile that veil, removed or thrown aside,  
 Went floating from her, darkening as it went ;  
 And a huge mass, to bury or to hide,  
 Approach’d this glory of the firmament,  
 Who meekly yields and is obscured,—content  
 With one calm triumph of a modest pride.”

The following specimen may be noticed, by the way, as presenting a striking instance of the combined action of reflective and imaginative power :—

“ In my mind’s eye a temple, like a cloud,  
 Slowly surmounting some invidious hill,  
 Rose out of darkness : the bright work stood still,  
 And might of its own beauty have been proud.  
 But it was fashion’d and to God was vow’d  
 By virtues that diffused, in every part,  
 Spirit divine through forms of human art :  
 Faith had her arch,—her arch when winds blow loud,

Into the consciousness of safety thrill'd ;  
 And Love her towers of dread foundation laid  
 Under the grave of things ; Hope had her spire  
 Star-high, and pointing still to something higher.  
 Trembling I gazed, but heard a voice : it said,  
 Hell-gates are powerless phantoms when we build."

The recently-published volume of poems by Mr. Wordsworth contains a number of sonnets showing his talent in unabated vigour :—

"TO THE PLANET VENUS, AN EVENING STAR.

COMPOSED AT LOCH-LOMOND.

" Though joy attend thee, orient, at the birth  
 Of dawn, it cheers the lofty spirit most  
 To watch thy course when daylight, fled from earth,  
 In the gray sky hath left his lingering ghost  
 Perplex'd, as if between a splendour lost  
 And splendour slowly mustering. Since the sun,  
 The absolute, the world-absorbing One,  
 Relinquish'd half his empire to the host,  
 Embolden'd by thy guidance, holy star,  
 Holy as princely, who that looks on thee,  
 Touching, as now, in thy humility  
 The mountain-borders of this scat of care,  
 Can question that thy countenance is bright,  
 Celestial Power ! as much with love as light ? "

One word more on this subject of definition before I leave it. Some one perhaps may seek to resolve his doubts on the acceptance of the term "sonnet," by that innocent-hearted method of looking into the dictionary. In the folio edition of Johnson's he will find the following definition :—" *Sonnet*, a short poem consisting of fourteen lines, of which the rhymes are adjusted by a particular rule. It is not very suitable to the English language, and has not been used by any man of eminence since Milton." And then, in evidence of the lexicographer's conception of the character of the poem in question, inserted at length is Milton's sonnet, written on the detraction which followed his "Tetrachordon" and other of his prose treatises. It was a piece of scoff at his political foci ; and the humour of it, such as it is, seems to consist in the introduction of as many rugged proper names as the poet could manage in the space of fourteen metrical lines. The smile of the great republican poet, at least as far as we trace it in his prose writings, was certainly not his most agreeable expression : it was tinged with bitterness. If Dr. Johnson meant, as no doubt he did, to cite that sonnet as a fair specimen, it either evinces a lamentable want of taste, or is additional proof how completely his vision was sealed to the wealth of the best periods of English poetry. The definition which succeeds to the above

is "*Sonnetteer*, a small poet; in contempt." Let us see who they are. To say nothing of the worthy train of early poets who were small only by comparison with their great contemporaries, the sonnet was a favourite form of composition with each one of that glorious triumvirate who kindled the flame of poetry higher than ever since the creation it flamed by mere human kindling, and kept it burning at its brightest for a century:—EDMUND SPENSER, WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE, JOHN MILTON, —sonnetteers all,—“small poets, in contempt!” Samuel Johnson! in charity I hope that you are forgiven!

My principal object, thus far, has been merely to illustrate what form of English poetry it is which is designated by the name of the sonnet, and incidentally to call attention to the true conception and exquisite finish of the specimens, selected with no very great pains, from the pages of a living poet. Let it now be distinctly understood that I do not, of course, claim for England the invention of the sonnet. It had its birth under a Southern sky. Whether Italian or Provençal in its origin would not be pertinent at present to discuss. Its date is anterior to Petrarch, though, from the fact that it was developed and rendered more popular by him, it is identified so intimately with his name. There is a theory suggested by Ginguené or Sismondi, which traces to the poetry of the Arabs the fashion of continuing and intermingling the metrical sounds in their verses. Now, this is one of the distinguishing features of the sonnet; and the use of rhyme, which is another, is a Gothic fashion,—a northern barbarism, as it was regarded by all who, like old Roger Ascham, fed in their hearts the hope of living to see their vernacular dialects set to the tune of hexameters. May it not be, then, that the wealth of several different quarters of the globe was laid under contribution to be coined in the diminutive mould of the sonnet? It would be a singular boast for anything so humble and unassuming. It is easy, we are aware, to weave theories, and, upon this subject, to extract much plausibility from the fact of the singular fusing of the European and Saracenic races together in the South of Europe during a part of the Middle Ages. History presents, probably, no more extraordinary instance of the kind than the intermingling of three distinct races in a very limited territory at the time of the Norman establishment in Sicily: there was the remnant of the old Sicilian race—their conquerors, the Arabs—and the final victor, the Norman. Well might their music blend together, where they were girt in by the ocean in this little plot. In all diffidence we offer our fancy—we will not dignify it with the title of theory—that one graft was brought by the Arab from the East, and another from the region of the Goth, and that these grew into one growth under the genial influence of an Italian or Sicilian sun.



How is a nation's claim to any form of composition, whether metrical or not, to be established? Not by discovery or preoccupation. Parnassus is as free and illimitable as the ocean or the wind. If there be any method of taking a ceremonious possession, as territory is acquired by planting a standard or erecting a pile of stones, I have yet to learn what it is. It would not be more presumptuous and irrational to attempt to check the free current of a breeze that has wafted over Italy, than to contend that a certain arrangement of poetic melodies first uttered there must, therefore, remain Italian to the end of time. The domain of letters is no more susceptible of private exclusive dominion than is the open sea. If there should be perceived a disposition on the one hand to assert, and on the other to yield to such a claim, it would be time for some one, invoking the spirit of old Grotius to his aid, to compile a *Helicon Liberum*. What would it be but reviving the principle of the old Portuguese claim? Petrarch, like De Gama, may have all the fame of discovery, but we yield nothing of long-maintained possession and of present title. We claim our ancient English rights of sailing on the wide sea wherever the winds may carry us, and of tuning our language to any note to which it will answer.

Any form of writing, no matter how artificial in its structure or how remote in its origin, may be naturalized into a language, if it is adapted to the character of that language, and if writers can be found who have shown this by actual experiment. In reference simply to origin, the sonnet is an exotic; but so is the epic or the ode. I cheerfully admit as much in one case as in the other, but nothing more; and this admission is but equivalent to the acknowledgment that Homer came into the world before Milton, Pindar before Dryden and Gray, and Petrarch before Surrey. A seed from this Southern plant has been sown in the soil of English literature, and, exposed to all the inclemency of a Northern climate, it has been followed by a growth as vigorous and flourishing as the parent-stock. What I take exception to is the propensity still to regard it as an unnatural transplantation, or a forced and artificial growth. When we dwell with an exulting national pride upon the pages of the "Paradise Lost,"—our own English epic,—we are never rebuked by being reminded of the claims of Homer. And when we read the English sonnet, able as we are to cite hundreds of them which would adorn the literature of any country, we cannot consent to stand always cap-in-hand to the shade of Petrarch. A brief reference to a few of the English sonnet-writers of different periods will firmly establish our claim, and serve at the same time to correct the prejudices against the form itself.

The most obvious of these prejudices is directed against the narrow



and precise limits of the sonnet. How, it is asked, can the free spirit of poetry breathe in such bondage,—the certain bounds of fourteen lines, never to be passed over, yet always to be reached? How can fancy or imagination survive? If the sentiment be expansive or the imagery abundant, all must be cramped or curtailed. If, on the other hand, it can touch the reader's heart in an expression more brief, it must, notwithstanding, be stretched out to the standard. Such is the argument; and, as a matter of course, Procrustes' bed is usually rolled in by way of illustration. Richness of thought and fancy must be reduced, and poverty must be eked out. Now, all of this, if true, is very objectionable, and that it is often true there is many a luckless sonnet on record to testify. But what does it prove? Not that the sonnet is an inappropriate form of poetry, but only that it is often employed upon subjects that are not adapted to it, and by writers who are unequal to it. The objection establishes nothing more than that there may be an incompetent poet or an injudicious selection of the topic,—an objection surely not peculiar, but which would form an equally reasonable prejudice against the ode, the drama, or the epic. But the complaint does not stop here. One fault, it is alleged, leads to another,—violations of literary propriety, like breaches of veracity, being of a very social tendency. Unnatural forms of expression are traced as a necessary consequence of an unnatural form of composition. The poet, unable, by reason of his artificial restraints, to give sufficient development to his feeling or his imagery, finds himself obliged to produce his impression by resorting to points and antitheses, and all the devices of artificial expression. Hence, it is said, the conceits for which the Italian sonnet is signally noted, and which may be observed also in no inconsiderable degree in so many of those of other nations. Again, we might resist this attack by charging the fault upon the individual poet: it proves his weakness and nothing else. But we are willing to take the burden of proof upon ourselves. We maintain that these faults are not naturally or necessarily inherent in the sonnet; and how can the question be better settled than by reference to what has actually been accomplished by it? Let us conceive, proposed as a topic for a sonnet, a vindication of the form of poetry itself, to be effected by an enumeration of the famed poets of various countries who have made use of it, with allusions to their general character, the prominent circumstances of their lives, and their several purposes in writing; this to be done adequately, without restraint or prolixity, in language at once poetical and natural, and with a strict regard to the requisitions of versification. The conception would be surely ample enough for a poem of fourteen

lines, under peculiar metrical laws. Whether the sonnet be equal to it may be best ascertained by the perusal of another of Wordsworth's, in which the reader will recognise the execution of the conception which we have just sketched in a very lifeless paraphrase :—

“ Scorn not the sonnet ; critic, you have frown'd,  
 Mindless of its just honours : with this key  
 Shakspeare unlock'd his heart ; the melody  
 Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound ;  
 A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound ;  
 Camoens soothed with it an exile's grief ;  
 The sonnet glitter'd a gay myrtle-leaf  
 Amid the cypress with which Dante crown'd  
 His visionary brow ; a glowworm lamp,  
 It cheer'd mild Spenser, call'd from fairy-land  
 To struggle through dark ways ; and when a damp  
 Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand  
 The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew  
 Soul-animating strains,—alas, too few ! ”

What could be more finished, more perfect, whether you regard it for its mere fancy, or as a piece of eulogy or criticism ? What more natural in the expression, more free from everything like false effect, more varied in its harmonies ? What melody could be sweeter than the fall of its close ? Is there a word that could be taken away, or one that could be added ? Well would it alone sustain the fine illustration which has been given of Wordsworth's sonnets, and which is also in a great measure applicable to all the best sonnets in the language :—  
 “ Wordsworth's sonnet never goes off, as it were, with a clap or repercussion at the close : but is thrown up like a rocket, breaks into light, and falls in a soft shower of brightness.” Another, very characteristic of his general manner, may serve to show that a very simple sentiment—that of local association—may be gracefully amplified to the space of the sonnet, without any of the insipid dilution which distinguishes so many of them :—

‘ There is a little unpretending rill  
 Of limpid water, humbler far than aught  
 That e'er among men or naiads sought  
 Notice or name ! It quivers down the hill,  
 Furrowing its shallow way with dubious will ;  
 Yet to my mind this scanty stream is brought  
 Oftener than Ganges or the Nile ; a thought  
 Of private recollection sweet and still !  
 Months perish with their moons ; year treads on year ;  
 But, faithful Emma, thou with me canst say

That, while ten thousand pleasures disappear,  
 And flies their memory fast almost as they,  
 The immortal spirit of one happy day  
 Lingers beside that rill, in vision clear."

I am tempted to add another sonnet, as a happy specimen of art,—a singular instance of secondary description, illustrating clearly the frequent analogy between poetry and painting, or, to describe it more philosophically, between fancy and the bodily eye :

"UPON THE SIGHT OF A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE,

PAINTED BY SIR G. H. BEAUMONT, BART.

" Praised be the art whose subtle power could stay  
 Yon cloud, and fix it in that glorious shape,  
 Nor would permit the thin smoke to escape,  
 Nor those bright sunbeams to forsake the day ;  
 Which stopp'd that band of travellers on their way,  
 Ere they were lost within the shady wood ;  
 And show'd the bark upon the glassy flood  
 For ever anchor'd in her sheltering bay.  
 Soul-soothing art ; which morning, noontide, even,  
 Do serve with all their changeful pageantry ;  
 Thou, with ambition modest yet sublime,  
 Here, for the sight of mortal man, hast given  
 To one brief moment caught from fleeting time  
 The appropriate calm of blest eternity."

There is also great merit in the following as a piece of landscape description, illuminated with a very rich moral light, the imagery of the closing lines, especially, evincing admirable taste :—

"A PARSONAGE IN OXFORDSHIRE.

" Where holy ground begins, unhallow'd ends,  
 Is mark'd by no distinguishable line ;  
 The turf unites, the pathways intertwine ;  
 And, wheresoe'er the stealing footstep tends,  
 Garden, and that domain where kindred, friends,  
 And neighbours rest together, here confound  
 Their several features, mingled like the sound  
 Of many waters, or as evening blends  
 With shady night. Soft airs from shrub and flower  
 Waft fragrant greetings to each silent grave ;  
 And, while those lofty poplars gently wave  
 Their tops, between them comes and goes a sky  
 Bright as the glimpses of eternity  
 To saints accorded in their mortal hour."

The complaint of the narrowness of the limits of the sonnet appears indicative more of the character of the mind of him who makes it than

of anything else. Writers vary wonderfully in the room they require : some can breathe freely in no space narrower than a modern state paper, while others are more considerate. The former are not the men to write sonnets : we commend them to the epic. But is there not in this craving for space something that does not accord very well with true poetic temperament ? If a writer be indeed worthy of his calling, if he do indeed belong to that creative class who make the world they inhabit, what need has he of calling for more ground ? Is it not enough that he has a spot to rise from ? The peak of a broken crag, or the point of a blasted branch, would be sorry quarters indeed for a bear or a buffalo ; but the majesty of the eagle claims no wider sovereignty for his footing, when he is springing from the earth to bathe his wings in the floods of the sun. Or, when the lark soars, like a sick man's hope, to meet the coming dawn, the home he leaves is wrapped in the little circumference of a tuft of grass. To these the spirit of true poetry is kindred. The insatiate demand for room is the symptom of a restless and licentious intellect,—of feelings undisciplined. If we should hear it from the lips of one in whom we could discern a trace of poetic promise, we would address him in the language of affectionate entreaty :—Get thee to thy study, and there, seeking the writings of those who adorned our literature in that happy age when authors had not yet become part of a printer's stock in trade,—when men wrote from the fulness of the heart and not the emptiness of the purse,—and, communing with their pages, chasten thine own heart. There are doubtless many who are unable, and many who are unwilling, to brook the restraints of the sonnet ; but that proves only that there are many faint-hearted and many false-hearted poets. All that we contend for is that the difficulty, the existence of which we freely admit, is not insuperable ; that there is no quality of poetry which may not be brought within its bounds. When a poet repudiates it, he is the unconscious witness to convict himself of a licentiousness which he mistakes for the indignant spirit of true freedom. But, again, let the sonnet speak its own vindication :—

“ Nuns fret not at their convents' narrow room ;  
 And hermits are contented with their cells ;  
 And students with their pensive citadels ;  
 Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
 Sit blithe and happy ; bees, that soar for bloom  
 High as the highest peak of Furness Fells,  
 Will murmur by the hour in foxglove-bells ;  
 In truth the prison unto which we doom  
 Ourselves no prison is : and hence to me,

In sundry moods, 't was pastime to be bound  
 Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground :  
 Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)  
 Who have felt the weight of too much liberty  
 Should find brief solace there, as I have found."

It is to the narrow bounds of the sonnet that we may safely ascribe its frequent want of popularity, and the countless failures of many who have attempted it. For its most perfect conception and execution, it demands, I have little hesitation in saying, powers as great and varied as the epic itself. In addition to the qualifications for the usual forms of poetry, the poet must bring to the sonnet a profound judgment and a command of language that never fails; his power for condensation of thought must be irresistible; he must possess that suggestive talent in writing, by no means a common one, by which the reader may be set upon trains of thought or feeling. His heart must be under equal discipline. On the part of the reader, too, much is required. There is, as we all know, one state of mind for prose, and another for poetry. The former may correspond with many of the states of feeling in which men happen to be; the latter differs essentially from most of them. It varies with the constitution; it may be felt in different degrees at different times; often it requires a process of preparation. It was one of Charles Lamb's observations—deep-dyed as they all were in truth and the tints of his own peculiar humour—that "Milton almost requires a solemn service of music to be played before you enter upon him. But he brings his music, to which who listens had need bring docile thoughts and purged ears." It was a fine philosophical thought, entitled to more consideration, as coming from one whose heart, if ever the heart of man was, was in a state of perpetual susceptibility to all that is true and beautiful in nature. Now, this process of preparation is usually part of the poet's own work: much of every poem of any length may be devoted to the mere purpose of elevating the reader's feelings to the required pitch: the world is too much with us for us to dispense with the poet's chastening. But the brevity of the sonnet precludes it. The consequence is, that the reader, perusing it with feelings not sympathetic or not susceptible enough, may, with great injustice, impute to the poem a want of impression which really is the result only of his own mood. Every reflective reader of poetry must have noticed how differently he has been affected at different times by the same piece. The sonnet, therefore, while it requires a writer of peculiar ability, needs a reader of somewhat more than ordinary reading-capabilities. These are causes abundantly sufficient to account for



frequent failures in sonnet-writing, and frequent want of popularity when successful. But we greatly err if the sonnet be not a favourite abiding-place for him who, whether as a writer or a reader, joins to an intellect well disciplined a heart nursed in the spirit of genuine freedom. His feelings will be congenial with those of the gallant cavalier who kept the liberty of his soul unbroken by the durance of his body; and, in answer to the reproach of restraint, we can fancy him breaking out in the same exulting strains :—

“ Th’ enlargéd windes, that curle the flood,  
 Know no such libertie.  
 Stone walls do not a prison make  
 Nor iron barres a cage ;  
 Mindes innocent and quiet take  
 That for an hermitage.  
 If I have freedom in my love,  
 And in my soul am free,  
 Angels alone, that soare above,  
 Enjoy such libertie.”\*

If further proof be required of the capabilities of the sonnet, an argument of no mean authority may be found in the fact that it was not too narrow for the spirit of Shakspeare. If any one still believes that the loftiest poetic temperament should not brook its bondage, let him stand up and say so after reading the following, one of the least-neglected, perhaps, of the collection of Shakspeare’s sonnets :—

“ Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
 Admit impediments. Love is not love  
 Which alters when it alteration finds,  
 Or bends with the remover to remove :  
 Oh, no ; it is an ever-fixéd mark,  
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken ;  
 It is the star to every wandering bark,  
 Whose worth ’s unknown, although his height be taken.  
 Love ’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
 Within his bending sickle’s compass come ;  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
 If this be error and upon me proved,  
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.”

It would be difficult to cite a finer passage of moral poetry than this description of the master-passion.† How true and how ennobling to

\* Lovclace, 1642.

† The fame of having composed the finest *prose* delineation of the passion of Love may be claimed for Coleridge ; it may be found in a piece entitled “ The

our nature ! We at once recognise in it the abstraction of that conception which has found a dwelling and a name in the familiar forms of Desdemona, Juliet, Imogen, Cordelia,—of Romeo, and of Othello too, if that character be correctly understood. If this sonnet was written before his dramas, then it was the pregnant thought from which were destined to spring those inimitable creations of female character that have been loved, as if they were living beings, by thousands. If, as is most probable, it was written afterwards, it is Shakspeare's own comment, and might be prefixed as a most apposite motto to those dramas in which he has given life and motion to the conception. The gladdening influences of a lover's thoughts—the cheering light of a pure affection—were never depicted with truer feeling than in the following sonnet :—

“ When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweep my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,  
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least ;  
Yet in these thoughts, myself almost despising,  
Haply I think on thee. And then my state  
(Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate ;  
For thy sweet love, remember'd, such wealth brings,  
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.”

I make no apology for quoting from the same collection another specimen, in which the reader cannot fail to observe an abundant measure of that exquisite but uncloying sweetness which distinguishes so much of the old English poetry. This sonnet would have been a meet melody to be chanted, with the songs of Herbert and Herrick, by the honoured lips of old Izaak Walton :—

“ Oh how much more doth beauty beauteous seem  
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give !  
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem  
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.  
The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye  
As the perfum'd tincture of the roses,

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Improvisatore,” included in his poetical works. For philosophical analysis and for beauty of expression it is unequalled by any single passage on the subject. As a piece of abstract description or definition it is not surpassed by the celebrated definition of wit in Barrow's Sermons.

Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly  
 When summer's breath their mask'd buds discloses :  
 But, for their virtue only is their show,  
 They lived unwooded, and unrespected fade ;  
 Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so ;  
 Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made :  
 And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,  
 When that shall fade, by verse distils your truth."

Besides these objections, which are equally applicable to the sonnets of all nations, the English sonnet is charged with faults of its own. Dr. Johnson's opinion has been already adverted to. Lord Byron, in one of the very few sonnets he wrote, makes the same admission,—that it is a form of poetry not suited to our language ; and, though some allowance is to be made for the language of compliment which he was addressing to an Italian lady, yet the fact that the noble poet, with all his Italian promptings, so rarely made use of the sonnet, is proof enough of his sentiments. I have thus frankly referred to the opinions of Dr. Johnson and Lord Byron, (odd company indeed !) both strong names and witnesses against our cause. I must be allowed to speak of them with equal freedom. There will be no novelty in the expression of an opinion derogatory to Dr. Johnson's character as a critic of poetry, nor will it be necessary, I presume, to remind the reader of the errors, both of judgment and taste, in his principal critical work. Dr. Johnson had, in fact, a hearty love for only one period of English poetry, and that not its best period. His affection was given to the poetry of that time when the native vigour of the poetry of England was enfeebled by the introduction of Gallic refinements,—when the healthy, sanguine English Muse was miserably depleted. To say that he was little better than blind and deaf to all else would scarcely be using language too strong. Out of the limits of the period referred to, he praised only by compulsion, as is apparent from his reluctance, such as is manifested in his criticisms on the minor poems of Milton. There is no instance on record in which the guilt of literary omission attaches more strongly and has done more injury than in Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the English Poets." For aught that appears there, Chaucer, and Spenser, and Shakspeare (as a poet apart altogether from the dramatist), and Drayton, Daniel, Sir Philip Sidney, and others of the age of Queen Elizabeth,—the chief of the poets of England,—might never have breathed a verse. And, in the dreary absence of these, after what names is the misguided reader led in chase ? Stepney, Mallet, Grauville and Pomfret, Hughes and Yalden and Sprat,—“rats and mice and such small deer.”

Now, the school of poetry which was favourite with Dr. Johnson was exactly that by which the sonnet was completely repudiated; it demands too much of the substance of poetry to have found favour in the eyes of the Charles II. and Queen Anne's men.\* It is a fact of considerable interest as bearing on our subject, and one which will be appreciated by those who are familiar with the different ages of English poetry, that during the most artificial period the sonnet was neglected almost universally; and that it revives with the taste for the earlier models, which is one of the best features in the literature of our day, and from which we may infer that poetry at least is completing a cycle by a return to primitive power and simplicity. To invalidate the authority of Lord Byron's name may be a more delicate task than that we have just attempted. Conceding all the vigour of imagination that may be claimed for him by that large but decreasing class, his zealous admirers, I cannot but believe that he greatly wanted the qualities essential to success in the severer forms of poetry. This would have been especially felt in the sonnet. Neither his habits of thought nor his modes of feeling were adapted to it, nor had he sufficient command of expression. His head and his heart and his tongue were all undisciplined. The time has gone by, I hope, for the misplaced sympathy with what are called the eccentricities of genius, and for the fallacy which recognises the right of any mortal to claim exemption from the laws which universally control the intellectual as well as moral being of mankind. How much is it to be deplored that Lord Byron was too disdainful habitually to lay his restless head in the lap of nature! His conceptions, lofty as they unquestionably often were, were not distinct enough for a poem of limited size; his emotions, deep as they were, unhappily were not chastened. Language did not sit upon him as a garment, but girt him like harness, as his more discriminating admirer often, to his own discomfiture, perceives. When we hear Lord Byron's doubts as to the capabilities of the English language for the sonnet, we should recollect that he was far from being well read in English poetry, and that he was not well inclined to believe that what he himself was unequal to could be accomplished by any of his contemporaries.

But, leaving the witnesses, let us look to the charge. The sonnet is

\* We may be reminded that the selection for the *Lives* was made by the publishers. We are aware of that fact, but it is an inadequate apology. Dr. Johnson himself suggested names,—some of those we have referred to in the text. He might have controlled and extended the selection; or, if not, he might at least have proclaimed the existence of other treasures, if his taste had prompted him to an acquaintance with the earlier poetry of England

not suited to the English language. In what respect does the language fail? Surely not in expression; for no one will venture to deny that a certain number of English words will convey as much thought as an equal number of the words of any language, living or dead. The alleged defect refers, we may fairly presume, to considerations of versification. A poverty of rhyme and a deficiency of harmony are imputed to the language, which, if merited, would indeed disqualify it for the continuous melody of the sonnet. I regard the charge as an idle prejudice. To complain of language is a hackneyed device to conceal ignorance or incompetency. Let any one reflect on what has been accomplished by the English tongue, let him muse a while on the achievements of English prose or English verse, and he may well be impatient of these disloyal repinings. Whoever undertakes to bring down Sir Thomas Brown's record to our own times, to be the historian of vulgar errors, of men's follies and mistakes, should place this in the foremost rank,—the opinion which ascribes a narrowness to that glorious way over which Shakspeare and Milton, Taylor and Barrow, Baxter and Bunyan, Burke, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, have passed into the hearts and minds of the British race on both sides of the Atlantic.

The sonnet has been successfully naturalized into English literature. Its first introduction was contemporary with the early improvement in our poetry by which metrical forms of versification were substituted for the old rhythmical mode. Its prescriptive title is, therefore, as good as that of any other form. The first English sonnets were written by Henry Howard, the gallant but unfortunate Earl of Surrey. The melodies of strange languages had fallen on his ear; yet he neither remained abroad to renounce his own home, nor did he return with a heart corrupted by foreign travel, but, in a spirit of pure and lofty patriotism, he sought his native land, to call up the yet-buried harmonies of his mother-tongue. This honour is shared with him by his contemporary and friend, Sir Thomas Wyatt. I have already shown that the sonnet has been employed with honour by others,—the chief of English poets. In the hands of Shakspeare its form was modified; and, as we are much more disposed to regard him as a lawmaker than as an outlaw, we cannot but think that there is too dainty a preciseness in the hesitation which is felt in applying the name to other forms than the original model. We are ready to adopt Shakspeare's enlargement of the meaning of the word, because no essential principle whatever of the poem is sacrificed by the variety. But to avoid the appearance of a mere verbal dispute, if we adopt the stricter sense of the term, the severer form of the poem, the legitimate sonnet, as it is called, the poets of England have abundantly



vindicated the powers of the language. It is to a living poet that the glory of consummating this victory over a wide-spread prejudice is due. The notes that proclaimed this triumph of the English Muse are uttered by the sonnets of William Wordsworth. From these alone we might readily show the abundant richness of the language in rhymes, its power of expression, and its flexibility of metre. With those, indeed, who are accustomed only to the more prominent rhymes and the more marked forms of verse, the melody of the sonnet may often fall as on a deaf ear. But to a cultivated taste, and to the secret sense of hearing, apt for the music of poetry, we would cheerfully commit almost any one of Wordsworth's sonnets, without an apprehension that the sweetness and variety of its harmony would pass unheeded. The following may be taken after little more than a moment's selection :—

“ It is a beauteous evening, ealm and free :  
 The holy time is quiet as a nun  
 Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun  
 Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;  
 The gentleness of heaven is on the sea.  
 Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,  
 And doth, with his eternal motion, make  
 A sound like thunder—everlastingly.  
 Dear ehild ! dear girl ! that walkest with me here,  
 If thou appear'st untoueh'd by solemn thought,  
 Thy nature is not therefore less divine :  
 Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,  
 And worshippest at the Temple's inner shrine,  
 God being with thee when we know it not.”

Another prejudice, perhaps the most deeply seated, against the sonnet, results from an impression that it always treats a subject exclusively with reference to the feelings of the poet. Hence it is censured as egotistical, and is looked upon as the vent of moping and discontented humours, and of insipid sentimentality. That there are very many sonnets justly obnoxious to these reproaches may be freely admitted ; and, also, that a bad sonnet is, for reasons that might readily be stated, one of the worst of failures. Of those who have been able to find none other, I can only say that they have been indeed unfortunate in their selection. But I protest against this indiscriminate grouping of the good and bad. If the sonnet be judged on that principle, how will the epic abide it ? A bad epic is very bad, too, and a great deal more of it. It is one of the merits of the English sonnet-writers that they have qualified the *subjective* character of the poem ; the feelings of the poet are not necessarily most prominent : many of the best of the English

sonnets may be read without recognising him as anything more than a voice.

That the sonnet is egotistical is obviously only a comparative censure. Whether this is to be imputed to it for its reproach or its repute will manifestly depend upon whose egotism it is. If it express the feelings of a hollow heart or the thought of an empty head, nothing can be more valueless. But has it not been the key to open the secret cabinet of spirits whose stores were precious? When Shakspeare meditated upon his theatrical profession, it was in the sonnet that he breathed out his sense of degradation in that beautiful lament, of which the tone is a little louder than a sigh and yet not so harsh as a murmur. It is here that his genius, no longer embodied in its creations, appears to us in its individual nature;—he walks upon the earth in his own personal form. What poem can boast of greater interest?—

“Alas! ’t is true, I have gone here and there,  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,  
Made old offences of affections new.  
Most true it is that I have look’d on truth  
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,  
These blanches gave my heart another youth,  
And worse essays proved thee my best of love.  
Now all is done, save what shall have no end :  
Mine appetite I never more will grind  
On newer proof, to try an older friend,—  
A God in love, to whom I am confined.  
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,  
Even to thy pure and most, most loving breast.”

Again, in reference to the same topic :—

“Oh, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,  
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide  
Than public means, which public manners breeds.  
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand :  
Pity me, then, and wish I were renew’d ;  
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink  
Potions of eysell, ’gainst my strong infection ;  
No bitterness that I will bitter think,  
No double penance, to correct correction.  
Pity me, then, dear friend, and I assure ye  
Even that your pity is enough to cure me.”

This would be sweet language from any lips ; but what can be deeper than the pathos of it, when you reflect that it is the grief of one whose wisdom, for more than two centuries, has been reverently quoted by statesmen, philosophers, and divines, whose plots have wound round so many hearts and moistened so many eyes, whose pictures of passions have moved such sympathies, and whose wit has gladdened so many faces ? It is in his sonnets that you find the conclusive proof that he was "the *gentle* Shakspeare."\* It will be recollected that he retired to Stratford to pass the evening of his days. We quote the following sonnet, which appears to refer to that period, partly for the fine amplification it contains of a well-known phrase in Macbeth, and chiefly for the surpassing beauty of the images illustrative of a poet's silent old age. We challenge the poetry of the world against that one line :—

" That time of year thou mayest in me behold,  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
*Bare, ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang.*  
In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by-and-by black night doth take away,—  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.  
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long."

One other instance may be cited by way of refutation of the charge of insipidity brought against the sonnet. When Milton addressed the grave appeal of patriotism to his contemporaries, Cromwell and Fairfax

\* Of all the epithets that are attached to the name of Shakspeare, there are but two or three that are to be tolerated. You can scarcely, by means of any term, add to the conception of genius which is suggested by the single word "Shakspeare." The phrase, "the gentle Shakspeare," deserves to be a favourite one, because it teaches a truth of deep moral interest : it tells of the blessed union of genius and gentleness,—that there is a natural alliance between the highest powers of intellect and tenderest emotions of the heart. There might, perhaps, be no other objection than the appearance of quaintness to his sharing Hooker's epithet, "the judicious Shakspeare," as indicating those faculties which, combined with imagination, are found only in poets of the first order. Mr. Coleridge applied to Shakspeare the expression "the myriad-minded," *ανὴρ μυριοψύχων*, having *reclaimed* it from a Greek monk, by whom it had been used in reference to a patriarch of Constantinople. As to most other epithets for him, they are as tinkling cymbals.

and Vane, he chose this form. When he invoked a higher power, it was the sonnet by which he uttered the prayer, "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered hosts,"—a note so fearful and so loud that we can almost fancy it echoing over the valleys in which the bones of the martyrs lay covered with snow. And when, at last, no longer able to resist the belief that he had been labouring for an unworthy age, that he had been prompting to freedom a race that was sluggish and sensual, it was in the sonnet that he expressed his solemn resignation. It was a fitting close for his eventful career. The storm that had risen on the meridian of his life had slowly abated, and, while the fragments of it were yet strewn on every side and the thunders of his controversial voice were echoing in the distant sky, there broke forth, at sunset, a placid gleam of that light which had beamed upon his youth. His sight extinguished, a hostile dynasty restored,—“Darkness before and Danger’s voice behind,”—he bowed his head with the unsoured cheerfulness of his early days. In that spirit we find him in the sonnets communing with a few chosen friends and with his God. To appreciate Milton’s sonnets fully, we should refresh our recollections of some of his prose-writings; we should recall the fierce indignation and the bitter scorn hurled against Salmasius; we should recur to the closing passages of his tract of “Reformation in England,”—the most awful imprecation ever uttered by the voice of man, save when it has been prophetic of the vengeance of the Almighty. Then let either of the sonnets addressed to Cyriac Skinner be read:—

“Cyriac, this three years’ day these eyes, though clear  
 To outward view of blemish or of spot,  
 Bereft of light their seeing have forgot,  
 Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear  
 Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,  
 Or man or woman. Yet I argue not  
 Against Heaven’s hand or will, nor bate a jot  
 Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer  
 Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?  
 The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied  
 In liberty’s defence, my noble task,  
 Of which all Europe talks from side to side.  
 This thought might lead me through the world’s vain mask,  
 Content, though blind, had I no better guide.”

Can it be that the torrent which before leaped so madly and so loudly from rock to rock has passed into this gentle current? How full, how tranquil, is its flow!

Spenser’s sonnets are of secondary merit. Inferior to his other minor

poems, they are unimpassioned productions, of a character which seems to be suggested by the title "*Amoretti*" prefixed to them. The poet who, as a sonnet-writer, has gained a place by the side of Shakspeare and Milton, is Wordsworth. And when it is considered that all of these have given to the world works of a more enlarged form and of the highest order of poems, it would seem that the sonnet was used as a kind of private tablet to preserve the detached and passing thoughts which must ever be rising in the ceaseless fountain of a great poet's heart. It is the record of

"The sessions of sweet, silent thought,"

to borrow from a sonnet of Shakspeare one of those exquisite phrases which fell so naturally and so gracefully from his tongue, and which justify us in saying (not irreverently, we trust) that he spake as never man spake. Let no one look upon the little poem with a hasty superciliousness. I have shown that it has been the retreat of poetic genius of the first rank,—an oratory for those who have worthily ministered in the solemnities of cathedral service.

The sonnets of Wordsworth would richly deserve a separate examination. He, more than any other poet, has shown its adaptation to a very great variety of subject and of feeling. If there were none other in the language, there would be reason enough to claim the sonnet as a form of poetry completely naturalized into English literature. The public is at last rendering him justice; the sound of the war that was waged against him has died away. It is his singularly happy fortune, in which his early admirers especially sympathize, to witness the beginning of the maturity of his fame. It will be completed by the reputation of his sonnets, which will probably be the last of his works to gain very general favour. For this reason we have quoted from them freely, and if the reader desire the eloquence, the pathos, and the philosophy of poetry, with all its harmonies, we commend him to the several collections of sonnets among the poems of Wordsworth.

In adverting to contemporary poetry, we cannot suppress a regret that Coleridge—that other great light, but recently extinguished—did not, in the later periods of his life, revive his early attachment to the sonnet. In expressing this regret, I would not be understood as participating in the charge of inactivity that has so inconsiderately been brought against him. Of that injustice we wash our hands, for we entertain too deep a gratitude for what he has done, and too firm conviction that few writers have contributed more to the thoughts of their fellow-beings. Coleridge has been our friend,—our companion, our



guide, our own familiar friend. We could not lay upon the grass that grows on his grave the weight of the lightest complaint. I merely regret that in his old age he did not renew the series of his youthful sonnets, because his constitutional habits of reflection and his singular powers of versification preëminently qualified him for this form of poetry. I could readily point out many a passage in Mr. Coleridge's prose-works, in which some noble thought is illuminated by a richly imaginative illustration, and which would need only the metrical arrangement to constitute a sonnet of the first order. His son, Hartley Coleridge, who has given proof that the genius of the family has not been buried in the father's grave, might find in such a process of transformation a task affectionate to the memory of his parent and worthy of his own powers.\*

It is irksome, we are aware, to write from other men's suggestions, and the best efforts of mind are those which are purely self-evolved. The mere difficulty of any undertaking would be no obstacle to the intellect that could conceive a sonnet in all respects so adequate to its high theme as the following from the poems of Hartley Coleridge:—

“TO SHAKSPEARE.

“The soul of man is larger than the sky,—  
Deeper than ocean, or abysmal dark  
Of the unfathom'd centre. Like that ark  
Which in its sacred hold uplifted high,  
O'er the drown'd hills, the human family,  
And stock reserved of every living kind,

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\* If our voice could reach him, we would commend such passages as the following as suitable material for a sonnet: the fine comparison in the “Friend,”—“Human experience, like the stern-lights of a ship at sea, illumines only the path we have passed over;”—or Coleridge's impassioned wish respecting the reception of his works:—“Would to Heaven that the verdict to be passed on my labours depended on those who least needed them! The water-lily, in the midst of the waters, lifts up its broad leaves and expands its petals at the first pattering of the shower, and rejoices in the rain with a quicker sympathy than the parched shrub in the sandy desert;”—or his bold conception respecting the design of miracles, in the “Statesman's Manual:”—“It was only to overthrow the usurpation exercised in and through the senses, that the senses were miraculously appealed to. Reason and revelation are their own evidence. The natural sun is, in this respect, a symbol of the spiritual. Ere he is fully arisen, and while his glories are still under veil, he calls up the breeze to chase away the usurping vapours of the night-season, and thus converts the air itself into the minister of its own purification; not, surely, in proof or elucidation of the light from heaven, but to prevent its intereception.”

So, in the compass of the single mind,  
 The seeds and pregnant forms in essence lie  
 That make all worlds. Great poet ! 't was thy art  
 To know thyself, and in thyself to be  
 Whate'er Love, Hate, Ambition, Destiny,  
 Or the firm fatal Purpose of the Heart,  
 Can make of Man. Yet thou wert still the same,  
 Serene of thought, unhurt by thy own flame."

In closing my enumeration of the capabilities of the sonnet, there is one other purpose to which it was equal. It could express the feelings of Charles Lamb. Why of Charles Lamb more than of any one else? Reader, if you ask that question you have not yet learned the dear mystery of those two monosyllables,—"*Charles Lamb*." But if you have been more fortunate, how much of the spirit of "*Elia*" will you not recognise in these two brief poems!—

" WORK.

" Who first invented Work, and bound the free  
 And holiday-rejoicing spirit down  
 To the ever-haunting importunity  
 Of business in the green fields, and the town,  
 To plough, loom, anvil, spade,—and, oh ! most sad,  
 To that dry drudgery at the desk's dead wood ?  
 Who but the being unblest, alien from good,  
 Sabbathless Satan ! he who his unglad  
 Task ever plies 'mid rotatory burnings,  
 That round and round incalculably reel—  
 For wrath divine hath made him like a wheel  
 In that red realm from which are no returnings ;  
 Where, toiling and turmoiling, ever and aye,  
 He and his thoughts keep pensive working-day."

" LEISURE.

" They talk of time, and of time's galling yoke.  
 That like a millstone on man's mind doth press,  
 Which only works and business can redress ;  
 Of divine Leisure such foul lies are spoke,  
 Wounding her fair gifts with calumnious stroke.  
 But might I, fed with silent meditation,  
 Assoiled live from that fiend, Occupation,—  
*Improbis labor*, which hath my spirit broke,  
 I'd drink of time's rich cup, and never surfeit ;  
 Fling in more days than went to make the gem  
 That crown'd the white top of Methusalem ;  
 Yea, on my weak neck take, and never forfeit,  
 Like Atlas bearing up the dainty sky,  
 The heaven-sweet burden of eternity."

I have thus endeavoured, not very systematically, to vindicate a neglected department of English poetry. I never engage in an investigation of the kind, involving a recurrence to the early periods of English literature, without feeling disposed, on closing it, to give way to a thanksgiving that "the lines have fallen to us in such pleasant places; that we have so goodly a heritage." To the student of poetry—we hope a distinction is drawn between such and many of the ordinary readers of poetry—we commend the sonnet as worthy of his regard, and as one of the best tests of a cultivated taste.

The public taste for the sonnet is reviving, and it would not be a difficult task to give it a true tone. Let a selection be made from the sonnets of Shakspeare, Milton, Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, and other of the earlier poets, and from those of Warton, Bowles, Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, and others, illustrated with occasional critical notices. A volume might be formed into which none but the best English sonnets should be admitted. Besides its intrinsic merit, such a book would possess much of the charm of novelty, and, what would distinguish it most favourably from all books of selections, each selection would be a complete and perfect poem in itself. I can scarcely imagine a more agreeable volume for the study or for the parlour-table. I recommend the suggestion to some enterprising publisher, as one likely to be successful, and which would certainly render a service to the cause of English letters.

## ESSAY II.

### Poems of Hartley Coleridge.

WE love to meet occasionally with a new name in the annals of literature. For, though there is a sovereign company to whom we never falter in our allegiance, yet, for the honour of time present, and for the satisfaction of knowing that the best portion of the world is not standing still, we rejoice now and then to hail a new author. Under this designation we desire to be distinctly understood as not including that growing class of handicraftsmen who are engaged in the manufacture of what by courtesy are called books. When we speak of authorship, we mean that occupation which gives to a name an abiding-place in the history of letters. It is one of the evils of the accumulation of modern publications, that a man, unless gifted with supernatural reading-powers,

is compelled to be somewhat reserved in forming new literary acquaintances. He contents himself with his old friends; he retreats to the shelf of his library that has become endeared to him; he finds his security among the familiar volumes that he could lay his hand upon in the dark; he is shy of new-made gentry. Yet these very feelings probably enhance the pleasure of meeting with a volume which bears the stamp of something above the mere mechanism of bookmaking.

It is an added pleasure to be able to greet a new *poet*. The world, we are apprehensive, is growing too *prosy*. We are haunted with a vague sort of alarm—more like a dream, or a nightmare, than a waking thought—that hosts of the tenants of this goodly green globe will turn into brokers and money-dealers. The hearts of men, we fear, will be in the stocks. It is one of the characteristics of the times, that whole communities are alarmingly utilitarian. Nothing is secure from the base uses of economists and calculators; no spot or edifice, however hallowed, is assured in its moral associations; no spectacle, however glorious by the work of nature, is safe from the rude touch of heartless speculation. Men have been found bold enough to lay their impious hands upon scenes the most awful in creation. The cataract and the cascade are measured for water-power; the mountain-torrent is a feeder. A traveller, revisiting a district of country after a few years' absence, inquires after a waterfall as he does after an old inhabitant, and is no more surprised at finding that one has gone to his rest than that the other has been turned to its work. Niagara has scarcely been secure. Presumptions as modern "improvement" is, there need not, we suppose, be a rational fear that the ceaseless discharge of more than five inland seas might be perceptibly diminished; but that the matchless sublimity of that spot may be grievously impaired, we have greatly feared. Our last pilgrimage to that place of worship—that shrine of the Almighty—was hastened by this apprehension. As we approached it, we heard of railroads to the Falls,—of the "City of the Falls,"—of town-lots, and of water-power. We saw, with a heavy heart, the actual plan of these devices. Alas! thought we, shall that voice of the Creator be silenced?—shall the deep that there crieth unto deep be hushed? But there came glad tidings that nature was avenged. The bold mortal—the Titau of the land-jobbers—who had dared to traffic with her glories was laid prostrate in the very deed. We turned pagan for the nonce, and gave thanks to the spirit of the cataract, whom, in fancy, we beheld triumphing over the prostrate evil genins of Speculation. It will, we fondly trust, prove a lesson against future presumption. We have no fear that man, with all the pomp and power and

pride of mechanism, can draw more than a drop from that flow; yet he may most vexatiously intrude: the shrill accents of art may be mingled with the solemn tones of nature,—a harsh accompaniment to the unison of voices of the great waters. The surrounding scenery may be sadly defaced, if touched by any hand which is not restrained by a sense of the sublimities of the place. As we wandered about the neighbourhood, a group of Indians glided across our path,—a young Tuscarora, with a very unabated look, and his squaw with her infant peering out of its cradle on its mother's back. By the by, an Indian mother's love should be exceeding deep, we surmise, for her dear little savage is borne so much more than the infants of the sophisticated matrons in civilized communities. As we looked at them, a thought came into our mind that the traces of the world as it has been were not yet quite effaced,—that something was still left untouched by the restless, feverish hand of covetousness. We gazed upon the savages as the Ancient Mariner did upon the bright water snakes:—

“ A spring of love gush'd from my heart,  
And I bless'd them unaware;  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I bless'd them unaware.”

We have no ambition to be sentimentally conservative; but we do lament that the spirit of change is restrained by no higher consideration than a distrust of investment, and that it has no fear of assaulting the bounds set by nature or by moral association. It is only when it transgresses its lawful limits—as in the glaring instance we have adverted to—that we deplore the progress of improvement so called. The world would be all the better, we fancy, if the practical fit which is on it were somewhat abated. A factitious standard has been introduced by the self-sufficient wisdom of the day, which tests all things by what is called a practical character,—which means, we believe, the quality of teaching men to make money, or to increase the crops, or to multiply the fabric of “stuffs,” under which latter denomination may be included a large proportion of the products of the press. Books are valued according to the same standard. Now, we most thankfully greet any literary effort which recognises a higher aim and a nobler end. Surely there is a practical character of a better kind than that which is indicated by the ordinary acceptation of the term; surely something more is to be *done* than to administer to man's physical wants; he is to be supplied with something more than food, and clothing, and the trash called “light reading” by those who look upon books as mere allies against time. A writer elevating himself above the lower spheres of authorship is



worthy of a more than ordinary welcome. We delight, therefore, we repeat, to meet with a new *poet*.

The name of Hartley Coleridge will probably be new to many of our readers. He is the son—the first-born—of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet and philosopher: we always hesitate which to call him, and regret that the language supplies no word comprehensive of both titles. Mr. Hartley Coleridge has therefore a patrimonial reputation. How far, however, that species of inheritance may be available to a man's own reputation, is, we think, somewhat questionable; for it is quite as apt to induce an invidious comparison as a willingness to trace the ancestral power. It has the effect of interesting public curiosity, but beyond that the heir's own fame must be earned by his own efforts.

It is pleasing to find any instance in which the strength and qualities of the mind have descended from father or mother to the offspring. The likeness has much greater interest than those physical similitudes in which there is often so carefully transmitted the shape of a nose or a mouth, or the twist of an eyebrow, or that most imperishable of all traits, which is rarely quenched by the lapse of less than three or four generations,—a head of red hair. A case of intellectual inheritance is an agreeable exception to the general tendency to degeneracy. The necessity of crossing the breed seems to make such brutes of us that it is not a pleasing theory. The instances of hereditary talent in literature are, however, we are obliged to acknowledge, of rare occurrence. After a few minutes labour of recollection, the only examples we are able to call to mind are Kings David and Solomon, and the two Drs. Sherlock. The latter of these cases is not of sufficient note, and the circumstance of inspiration obviously puts the former out of the question; for it might probably be regarded as an exception to a general rule rather than an illustration of it. Poetic genius especially is so delicate a combination, that it is likely to be destroyed by any change in its constitution. Two of Dryden's sons attempted to follow in their father's path; but the spirit of "glorious John" had fled, and what they wrote the world has willingly let die.\* Spenser left two sons,—one with a name at least that might well befit a poet, "Sylvanus Spenser,"—the

\* Perhaps in the constitution of the sons there was too large a proportion of the mother's character. A letter from Dryden's wife—the Lady Elizabeth, as she was styled, from her noble lineage of the Howards—has been preserved, in which the following passage occurs:—"Your father is much at woon as to his health, and his defnese is not wosce, but much as he was when he was heare. Give me a true account how my deare sonn Charles is head dus."

other with a name that would have suited one whose walks were on the highways of prose, "Peregrine Spenser." What, by the by, had become of the poet's own beautiful name, "Edmund Spenser"? Perhaps the child was so named that perished in the flames when Spenser's dwelling was fired by the Irish rebels and he driven from the country.\* Unless that child, over whose untimely and disastrous fate the poet's broken heart beat its last throbs, inherited some of the parent's spirit, his boundless imagination came not down to others of the name. Milton's son—John Milton, junior—died in his infancy; but, we dare say, had he lived longer, he would have been literally "a mute, inglorious Milton." Certainly his early death is not to be deplored, if we may conjecture what his character would have been from that of Milton's daughters, who grew weary of their intellectual attendance upon the blind old bard, and longed for the humble tasks of needlework. It is an ugly page in female history that records how they turned away from their communion with the spirit of their sire. "The irksomeness of their employment could not always be concealed, but broke out more and more into expressions of uneasiness; so that at length they were all sent out to learn some curious and ingenious sorts of manufactures that are proper for women to learn, particularly embroideries in gold or silver."† The glory of Shakspeare's name began and ended with himself,—his own unhereditary self. We hope that the name is not deenerated by the wear of any modern mortal, for it has passed above the common uses of men's names. How anomalous would a "Mr. or Mrs. Shakspeare" sound, and what perfect contradictions in terms would "the little Shakspeares" be! When the Rev. Mr. Dyce, one of Shakspeare's biographers, visited Stratford-on-Avon, in 1820, for the purpose of gathering traditions, he found a woman upwards of eighty years of age named Mary Hornby, who gained a livelihood by showing the house in which the bard was born. She claimed a descent from Shakspeare, her maiden name being Hart, and had evidently inherited a full share of his love of the drama. Her high ancestral feeling manifested itself by her saying, "I *writes* plays, sir," and producing a tragedy entitled "The Battle of Waterloo." The old woman, who had better been at her prayers, was, we presume, well read in the three parts of Henry VI.; she had assuredly selected a famous theme for "Alarums—Enter

\* This calamity is mentioned by Southey, in his notices of the early British poets, in a manner rather peculiar;—"When Tyrone's rebellion broke out, Spenser's house was burnt by the rebels, and *in it his papers and one of his children.*"—Southey's "British Poets."

† Life of Milton, by his nephew, Edward Philips.

English and French, fighting—Exeunt, fighting—Alarums.” So far as syntax is concerned, she seems to have been what the French critics in their ignorance are so fond of calling her great progenitor,—“a wild, irregular genius.” Such fallings off may well serve to rebuke man’s pride. It was one of the trials of the calamitous life of the sainted Jeremy Taylor to witness the debased career of his own children. Who could have thought that the offspring of one whose spirit dwelt so habitually in the regions of an aspiring devotion would have declined to such degenerate ways? One fell in a duel, staining his dying hand with the blood of his antagonist; the other, with a slower but as deep a perfidy, became a favourite compaiou of Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. One more of these melancholy instances of degeneracy: Izaak Walton, the great piscator, left an only son, bearing too his honoured name. He, an Izaak Walton, turned away from the banks of the sedgy Lea, became a travelled gentleman, studied the Fine Arts in Italy, returned to one of the English universities, and devoted himself to assisting in the compilation of an ecclesiastical history. There is no record of his having ever angled for a single fish. Another of old Izaak’s—“honest Mr. Walton’s”—descendants, but, fortunately, not bearing the name, which in this instance was spared the degradation, strayed still further from the harmless paths of his forefather, and acquired some notoriety among that craft who after a fashion are fishers of men, by the authorship of the work, doomed to most criminal associations, entitled, “Hawkins’s Pleas of the Crown.”

But we are loath to dwell longer on this sad topic. The frequent occurrences of such instances of degeneracy as we have adverted to would almost justify a congratulation on those cases where the race of an illustrious individual has become extinct with him. There would seem to be a tendency in nature to transmit the weaknesses and infirmities rather than the nobler parts of our being. Of this there is so much hazard, that, whenever great powers are blended with any defects, we are tempted to rejoice in our hearts on finding that the line of succession is broken. It would be difficult, for instance, to fancy any being more superlatively disagreeable than a young Dr. Johnson would in all probability have been; and surely, if nature had furnished such an individual, she would have been bound to supply a young Boswell to match him. It was wisely ordained, no doubt, that the late Miss Haunah More lived and died an “unwedded maiden old.” We must pause a moment to make our acknowledgment to Mr. Wordsworth for that phrase; for, having a profound affection for several of the class in question, we have long felt the need of some term as a substitute for that other one which has

become somewhat tinctured with reproach. The lovely piety which adorned the life of Hannah More might, in the second generation, have subsided into a residuum of mere starch ; or, if the aberration had been to the opposite extreme, and as wide as in the family of the good Jeremy Taylor, her descendant might have been an opera-singer or a figurante.

We have been led into these trains of reflection by taking up the volume of Mr. Hartley Coleridge's poems. A literary effort by a son of Coleridge was calculated to attract attention. The influence exerted by the father's writings was deeper than that of most authors ; the readers that were moved by him were strongly moved, and we could hardly believe that their influence would be inoperative on his own household. We had anticipations, therefore, of Hartley Coleridge before we knew of his literary pursuits. What he has so far accomplished may be considered chiefly as experiment for him and promise to the world. But enough, we think, has been done to show that the Coleridge name has not yet reaped the whole harvest of its fame. Hartley Coleridge has appeared as the author of the volume of poetry which we purpose examining in this article, and of a volume of biography,—“*The Lives of Distinguished Northerns*,”—a work of very considerable attractions, with a vein of pleasant writing on the surface and of fine philosophy beneath. The compliment has also been paid of throwing upon him suspicions of the authorship of that extraordinary and delightful production, “*The Doctor* ;” and, although the proofs seem to have accumulated more upon Southey than upon any one else, we are very reluctant to give up a belief of ours that Hartley Coleridge has a hand in it, participating, probably, with the laureate, and thus reviving that fine old custom of joint authorship which was of no uncommon occurrence in the early days of English literature.

Hartley Coleridge is, by a sort of necessity, a poet, and the lovers of his father's melodious imaginings had a right to indulge great hopes of him. His father's prayers and teachings marked him for the high converse of poesy ; and the beautiful allusions to him, when yet an infant, have kept a place in the hearts of the admirers of the sire open for the son. We feel towards Hartley Coleridge as if we could say that we knew him when a child. What happier introduction could he have had than by the little incident narrated with such true parental as well as poetic feeling in Coleridge's exquisite poem, “*The Nightingale*” ?—

“ Farewell, O warbler ! till to-morrow eve,  
And you, my friends ! farewell, a short farewell !  
We have been loitering long and pleasantly !



And now for our dear homes. That strain again !  
 Full fain it would delay me ! My dear babe,  
 Who, capable of no articulate sound,  
 Mars all things with his imitative lisp, —  
 How he would place his hand beside his ear,  
 His little hand, the small forefinger up,  
 And bid us listen ! And I deem it wise  
 To make him nature's playmate. He knows well  
 The evening star ; and once, when he awoke  
 In most distressful mood (some inward pain  
 Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream),  
 I hurried with him to our orchard-plot,  
 And he beheld the moon, and, hush'd at once,  
 Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,  
 While his fair eyes, that swam with undropp'd tears,  
 Did glitter in the yellow moonbeam ! Well ! —  
 It is a father's tale. But if that Heaven  
 Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up  
 Familiar with these songs, that with the night  
 He may associate joy ! — Once more, farewell,  
 Sweet nightingale ! Once more, my friends, farewell ! ”

And again, in the lines entitled “ Frost at Midnight : ” —

“ Dear babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,  
 Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,  
 Fill up the interspers'd vacancies  
 And momentary pauses of the thought !  
 My babe so beautiful ! it thrills my heart  
 With tender gladness thus to look at thee,  
 And think that thou shalt learn far other lore  
 And in far other scenes ! For I was rear'd  
 In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,  
 And saw naught lovely but the sky and stars.  
 But thou, my babe ! shalt wander like a breeze  
 By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags  
 Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds  
 Which image, in their bulk, both lakes and shores  
 And mountain-crags : so shalt thou see and hear  
 The lovely shades and sounds intelligible  
 Of that eternal language which thy God  
 Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
 Himself in all, and all things in himself.  
 Great universal Teacher ! he shall mould  
 Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

“ Therefore, all seasons shall be sweet to thee ;  
 Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
 With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing  
 Betwixt the tuft of snow on the bare branch



Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thateth  
 Smokes in the sun-thaw ; whether the eave-drops fall  
 Heard only in the tranees of the blast,  
 Or if the seeret ministry of frost  
 Shall hang them up in silent ieicles,  
 Quietly shining to the quiet moon."

Such aspirations must have shed a prosperous influence upon the expanding spirit of him whose childhood was thus watched over. The interest of this home-story is completed by the sweet response of the son to the aged parent, upon whose ear—soon after sealed by death—it may have sounded as an earnest of his early prayer. It is impossible not to be most favourably prepossessed by the dedication of these poems, not merely for the admirable simplicity of the expression, but for the pure and right-hearted feeling which pervades it :—

" DEDICATORY SONNET,

TO S. T. COLERIDGE.

" Father, and bard, revered ! to whom I owe—  
 Whate'er it be—my little art of numbers,  
 Thou, in thy night-watch, o'er my eradled slumbers  
 Didst meditate the verse that lives to show  
 (And long shall live, when we alike are low)  
 Thy prayer how ardent, and thy hope how strong,  
 That I should learn of nature's self the song,  
 The lore, which none but nature's pupils know.

" The prayer was heard : I 'wander'd, like a breeze,'  
 By mountain-brooks and solitary meres,  
 And gather'd there the shapes and fantasies  
 Which, mix'd with passions of my sadder years,  
 Compose this book. If good therein there be,  
 That good, my sire, I dedicate to thee.

" HARTLEY COLERIDGE."

The feeling with which the volume is offered to the public discovers the same good sense and feeling :—

" Of the verses contained in this volume, none, with a single exception, can claim the privilege of juvenile poems. I neither deprecate nor defy the censure of the critics. No man can know, of himself, whether he is, or is not, a poet. The thoughts, the feelings, the images, which are the material of poetry, are accessible to all who seek for them ; but the power to express, combine, and modify,—to make a truth of thought,—to earn a sympathy for feeling,—to convey an image to the inward eye, with all its influences and associations,—can only approve itself by experiment ; and the result of the experiment may not be known for

years. Such an experiment I have ventured to try, and I wait the result with patience. Should it be favourable, the present volume will shortly be followed by another, in which, if no more be accomplished, a higher strain is certainly attempted.”\*

This is language very appropriate to the modesty of a first effusion ; but the time will come, we are inclined to think, when Hartley Coleridge will feel that “a man *can* know of himself whether he is, or is not, a poet.” When he rises (as we trust he will) into that promised higher strain, he must rely upon his own consciousness rather than upon the appreciations of others. The poet who talks of high strains must not wait for results ; “soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and singing-robcs about him,”† he must not look too often on the world that he leaves beneath him. But diffidence is a good fault at any time.

This volume of poems has given us assurance against a misgiving that has occasionally insinuated itself into our minds—a fear that the great stream of English poetry may for a time be intermitted. Commencing at the close of the long interval which elapsed after Chaucer’s time, the series of eminent poets may be regarded as continuous from the date of the revival of poetry with the Earl of Surrey down to the present day. Sir Philip Sydney followed soon after that early period : he was mourned by Spenser, whose career was a little earlier than Shakspeare’s. The retired manhood of Shakspeare and the youth of Milton touched the same period of time. There is a tradition of an interview between Milton in his old age, and the youthful Dryden,—an interview, by-the-by, sought by the latter, for the purpose of making a request which gave but sorry promise of his subsequent power : he was seeking permission to turn “Paradise Lost” into a rhyming tragedy, called “The State of Innocence.” In one of his letters Pope has recorded having once seen Dryden, with a lament that his acquaintance reached no further :—“*Virgilium tantum vidi.*” Gray and Cowper brought the series down towards the close of the last century, and Crabbe and Rogers may be looked on as the connecting links with the great contemporary poets. Of these, Coleridge, Walter Scott, and Byron are in their graves ; Southey seems to have taken up his abode “in the cool element of prose.” The light is yet burning upon Rydal Mount,—with vigour enough, we fervently trust, to send forth its kindly influences upon human nature for years to come. But the course of nature is coming on ; and, in his beautiful lines on the death of the

\* Preface.

† Milton.

Ettrick Shepherd, "the old man eloquent" has told of the warning he has felt in the death of his contemporaries :—

" Like clouds that rake the mountain summit  
Or waves that own no curbing hand,  
How fast has brother follow'd brother  
From sunshine to the sunless land !  
" Yet I, whose lids from infant slumbers  
Were earlier raised, remain to hear  
A timid voice, that asks in whispers,  
' Who next will drop and disappear ? ' "

When Wordsworth, too, shall have passed to his rest,—well earned by a long life devoted, without reserve or intermission, to elevating the feelings and character of mankind,—where, we have sometimes asked ourselves, shall he be found who may prove equal to the inheritance ? If there be no one worthy to transmit the trust which for three centuries has not been forfeited, it will tell that a sad change has come over the spirit of that race who speak the English tongue. Let not this be thought an exaggeration. It is only the vulgar in intellect, and the indiscriminating, who look upon poetry as a mere superfluity,—an ornament, perhaps, but still only an excrescence of the mind. Who half as much as the poets have given permanency to the thoughts and feelings of the world as it was long ago ? What unaided human spirit in the wide universe of letters ever wrought half the influence of Shakspeare ? What name suggests a title of his genius and power ? "No man," said the elder Coleridge, "was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher ; for poetry is the blossom and the fragrant of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language." No poet, it may be added, entertaining an inadequate conception of his calling, can approach to eminence in it. We have no desire to wage a war for the poetasters,—the inspired of the annals, whether of souvenirs or of the addresses of watchmen and newspaper-carriers : we are speaking of other poetry. The sublime notion of poetry which should always guide a critical taste has been upheld in a fine panegyric by Wordsworth, in one of his prose treatises, which are not known as they should be, and from which we are, therefore, the more induced to quote the passage :—

"The man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor ; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude : the poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge ; it is the impassioned expression which is

in the countenance of all science. Emphatically may it be said of the poet, as Shakspeare hath said of man, that 'he looks before and after.' He is the rock of defence of human nature,—an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time. The objects of the poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge: it is immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present, but he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science,—not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, or mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed,—if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man."\*

Now, with our minds filled with such conceptions of the divine art, let us look whether Hartley Coleridge gives promise of being worthy to continue the succession of English poets; let us see what is the character of his poetic aspirations, and how high they have carried him. We find a partial answer in two of his sonnets, which serve a double purpose, of showing his conception of his calling, and his power over language and metre to give it utterance:—

"WHO IS THE POET?"

"Who is the poet? Who the man whose lines  
Live in the souls of men like household words?"

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\* Wordsworth's Poetical Works, Appendix II. Observations, &c.

Whose thought, spontaneous as the song of birds  
 With eldest truth coeval, still combines  
 With each day's product, and like morning shines,  
 Exempt from age ? 'T is he, and only he,  
 Who knows that truth is free, and only free,—  
 That virtue, acting in the strict confines  
 Of positive law, instructs the infant spirit  
 In its best strength, and proves its mere demerit  
 Rooted in earth, yet tending to the sky,—  
 With patient hope surveys the narrow bound,  
 Culls every flower that loves the lowly ground,  
 And, fraught with sweetness, wings her way on high."

#### "THE USE OF A POET.

"A thousand thoughts were stirring in my mind,  
 That strove in vain to fashion utterance meet ;  
 And each the other cross'd,—swift as a fleet  
 Of April clouds perplex'd by gusts of wind,  
 That veer, and veer around, before, behind.  
 Now History pointed to the custom'd beat ;  
 Now Fancy's clue, unravelling, led their feet  
 Through mazes manifold, and quaintly twined.  
 So were they straying,—so had ever stray'd,  
 Had not the wiser poets of the past  
 The vivid chart of human life display'd,  
 And taught the laws that regulate the blast,  
 Wedding wide impulse to calm forms of beauty,  
 And making peace 'twixt liberty and duty."

The subject is also touched in some lines quaintly entitled "POIETES APOIETES," in which, after lamenting his own feebleness, he tells, with a very pleasing allusion to his nativity and infancy, and a dark intimation of some unhappiness, of his poetic longings:—

"Divinest Poesy ! 't is thine to make  
 Age young—youth old—to baffle tyrant Time,—  
 From antique strains the hoary dust to shake,  
 And with familiar grace to crown new rhyme.

"Long have I loved thee,—long have loved in vain ;  
 Yet large the debt my spirit owes to thee :  
 Thou wreathedst my first hours in a rosy chain,  
 Rocking the cradle of my infancy.

"The lovely images of earth and sky  
 From thee I learn'd within my soul to treasure ;  
 And the strong magic of thy minstrelsy  
 Charms the world's tempest to a sweet, sad measure



"Nor Fortune's spite, nor hopes that once have been,  
 Hopes which no power of Fate can give again,—  
 Not the sad sentence—that my life must wean  
 From dear domestic joys,—nor all the train  
 "Of pregnant ills and penitential harms  
 That dog the rear of youth unwisely wasted,—  
 Can dim the lustre of thy stainless charms,  
 Or sour the sweetness that in thee I tasted."

We are glad to find Hartley Coleridge expressing his sense also of the characteristic weakness of a great deal of contemporary verse. The danger to which the cause of poetry appears chiefly to be exposed is the process of evaporation or sublimation by which modern versifiers so frequently separate its more superficial properties of sound and diction from its deeper and more abiding qualities of thought and feeling; for, dealing out their light wares, they give a pretext to the prose-witted ground-walkers to sneer even at real poetry, and turn away from it as if it too were milk for babes. These evils seem to lie beyond the reach of remedy, and, until the wit of criticism shall devise some artillery light enough for the warfare, the butterflies and the humming-birds must flutter with impunity. The manufacturers of the fantastic commodities of modern versification have become of late years so numerous, that they are setting up all the world over their little tabernacles of rhyme, which in solidity of structure mightily remind us of the fairy-palace described by old Michael Drayton:—

"The walls of spiders' legs are made,  
 Well mortiséd and finely laid;  
 He was the master of his trade,  
 It curiouslie that builded:  
 The windows of the eyes of cats,  
 And for the roof, instead of slats,  
 Is cover'd with the skins of bats,  
 With moonshine that are gilded."

The self-complacent tribe—no longer the "genus irritabile"—are chided by Hartley Coleridge with great gentleness in a sonnet of exquisite beauty:—

"Whither is gone the wisdom and the power  
 That ancient sages scatter'd with the notes  
 Of thought-suggesting lyres? The music floats  
 In the void air; e'en at this breathing hour  
 In every cell and every blooming bower  
 The sweetness of old lays is hovering still:  
 But the strong soul, the self-constraining will,  
 The rugged root that bare the winsome flower,

Is weak and wither'd. Were we like the fays  
 That sweetly nestle in the foxglove-bells,  
 Or lurk and murmur in the rose-lipp'd shells  
 Which Neptune to the earth for quit-rent pays,  
 Then might our pretty modern Philomels  
 Sustain our spirits with their ronn delays."

One of the best indications in this volume of poems is the power of reflection which pervades most of its pages. The sonnets (of which there are a considerable number) are of the first order of that difficult form of composition. It would not be easy to suggest three higher themes for the sonnet than are presented in those we are about to quote; and it would be extreme fastidiousness to desire an execution more faithful to their lofty conceptions:—

“HOMER.

“Far from all measured space, yet clear and plain  
 As sun at noon, ‘a mighty orb of song’  
 Illumes extremest heaven. Beyond the throng  
 Of lesser stars, that rise, and wax, and wane,  
 The transient rulers of the fickle main,  
 One stedfast light gleams through the dark and long  
 And narrowing aisle of memory. How strong,  
 How fortified with all the numerous train  
 Of human truths, great poet of thy kind,  
 Wert thou, whose verse, capacious as the sea  
 And various as the voices of the wind,  
 Swell'd with the gladness of the battle's glee,  
 And yet could glorify infirmity,  
 When Priam wept, or shame-struck Helen pined.”

“SHAKSPEARE.

“The soul of man is larger than the sky,  
 Deeper than ocean or the abysmal dark  
 Of the unfathom'd centre. Like the ark,  
 Which in its sacred hold nplifted high,  
 O'er the drown'd hills, the human family,<  
 And stock reserved of every living kind,  
 So, in the compass of the single mind,  
 The seeds and pregnant forms in essence lie  
 That make all worlds. Great poet! 't was thy art  
 To know thyself, and in thyself to be  
 Whate'er love, hate, ambition, destiny,  
 Or the firm, fatal purpose of the heart,  
 Can make of man. Yet thou wert still the same,  
 Serene of thought, unhurt by thy own flame.”

## "TO WORDSWORTH.

" There have been poets that in verse display  
 The elemental forms of human passions :  
 Poets have been, to whom the fickle fashions  
 And all the wilful humours of the day  
 Have furnish'd matter for a polish'd lay :  
 And many are the smooth elaborate tribe  
 Who, emulous of thee, the shape describe  
 And fain would every shifting hue portray  
 Of restless nature. But thou, mighty seer !  
 'T is thine to celebrate the thoughts that make  
 The life of souls, the truths for whose sweet sake  
 We to ourselves and to our God are dear.  
 Of nature's inuer shrine thou art the priest,  
 Where most she works when we perceive her least."

The poet who succeeds in the sonnet enjoys at least this one great privilege :—that his name is associated with some of the most illustrious names in the history of English poetry, and for the obvious reason that comparatively very few have been successful in that form of metrical writing. The reader familiar with Shakspeare's sonnets—and who that loves his own language is not ?—will not unfrequently find them recalled to his mind by the sonnets scattered through this volume ; for, without the slightest appearance of imitation, there is a similarity in the vein of feeling,—in the expression of a desponding love, of self-reproach and regrets,—and in the play of fancy,—which redounds greatly to the honour of our contemporary. The following would not suffer by a direct comparison with Shakspeare's well-known and beautiful sonnet on the unchangeableness of love :—

" Is love a fancy or a feeling ? No !  
 It is immortal as immaculate Truth.  
 'T is not a blossom, shed as soon as youth  
 Drops from the stem of life ; for it will grow  
 In barren regions, where no waters flow,  
 Nor ray of promise cheats the pensive gloom.  
 A darkling fire, faint hovering o'er the tomb,  
 That but itself and darkness naught doth show,  
 Is my love's being ; yet it cannot die,  
 Nor will it change, though all be changed beside ;  
 Though fairest beauty be no longer fair,  
 Though vows be false, and faith itself deny,  
 Though sharp enjoyment be a suicide,  
 And hope a spectre in a ruin bare."

Hartley Coleridge well knows that the sonnet may be used for other purposes than being charged with pensive regrets and the tender feelings.

It was once the exclusive property of love and melancholy, who piped upon it by turns. Milton seized it and blew a blast that in a moment revealed its unknown tones, and it has since been sounded to animate the high and tumultuous passions,—to cheer a people in moments of virtuous exultation, and to shame them in the days of degeneracy and corruption. A thought in one of Milton's sonnets is finely amplified in the following :—

“ LIBERTY.

“ Say, what is Freedom? What the right of souls,  
Which all who know are bound to keep or die,  
And who knows not, is dead? In vain ye pry  
In musty archives or retentive scrolls,  
Charters and statutes, constitutions, rolls,  
And remnants of the old world's history :—  
These show what has been, not what ought to be,  
Or teach at best how wiser Time controls  
Man's futile purposes. As vain the search  
Of restless factions, who, in lawless will,  
Fix the foundations of a creedless church,  
A lawless rule,—an anarchy of ill.  
But what is Freedom? Rightly understood,  
A universal license to be good.”

That is better doctrine than is brought to light by every class of politicians. We are not enthusiasts enough to fancy that a nation can be redeemed from political worthlessness by song; but it would be no difficult matter to show that the power of a popular poet may be a match against that of a demagogue. His influence may well be directed to control the feelings of a people,—to guide and to elevate them. The times are in need of writers to sustain a lofty tone of public sentiment; to depict, if it be only in fancy, a love of the common good, unqualified by private interest; to perpetuate, at least, the memory of the hardihood and simplicity of ancient patriotism. It may savour a little of satire, although we do not mean it as such, to say that this is a duty for the poets. Tyrtæus was blind of one eye, lame of a leg, something of a dwarf, and quite deformed: he could not have been what is called “a *pretty* poet,” but he was, for all that, a good general. The vigour of a thousand swords was in his strains. Although we imagine it is more difficult to draw out votes, the modern weapons, than it was to draw out swords, yet, may not somewhat of the terror of Tyrtæus's lyre be revived? There is a power in poetry for him who knows how to wield it, that can awaken the sensibilities of a people not quite sunk into the last stages of forgetfulness and torpidity.

In order to enable the reader to form his opinion of the sonnets contained in this volume, we are induced to add two more to our quotations,—one on the vision of poets, conceived in a fine classical mood :—

“The vale of Tempe had in vain been fair,—  
 Green Ida never deem'd the nurse of Jove,—  
 Each fabled stream, beneath its covert grove,  
 Had idly murmur'd to the idle air,—  
 The shaggy wolf had kept his horrid lair  
 In Delphi's cell and old Trophonius' cave,—  
 And the wild wailing of the Ionian wave  
 Had never blended with the sweet despair  
 Of Sappho's death-song,—if the sight inspired  
 Saw only what the visual organs show ;  
 If heaven-born fantasy no more required  
 Than what within the sphere of sense may grow :  
 The beauty to perceive of earthly things,  
 The mounting soul must heavenward plume her wings.”

The other is a charming instance of the strange thoughts that come into a poet's mind :—

“What was't awaken'd first the untried ear  
 Of that sole man who was all human kind ?  
 Was it the gladsome welcome of the wind,  
 Stirring the leaves that never yet were sere ?  
 The four mellifluous streams which flow'd so near,  
 Their lulling murmurs all in one combined ?  
 The note of bird unnamed ? The startled hind  
 Bursting the brake,—in wonder, not in fear  
 Of her new lord ? Or did the holy ground  
 Send forth mysterious melody to greet  
 The gracious pressure of immaculate feet ?  
 Did viewless seraphs rustle all around,  
 Making sweet music out of air as sweet ?  
 Or his own voice awake him with its sound ? ”

It is the meditative power of these poems that we have principally adverted to, not only because it is the property most favourably distinguishing them from the productions of many of the fraternity, but because it is that upon which the expectation of future success may be raised most securely. But this quality does not of itself constitute *poetry*, nor is it likely to form the most successful poetry, if it occur apart from the higher of the more properly poetical powers,—the imagination. It is the combined action of thought and imagination—of the reflective and creative powers—that indicates poetic genius ; and, from observing traces of that action on many of his pages, we are led to



believe that there is no poetic effort from which Hartley Coleridge need shrink, if the powers with which he is gifted are duly cultivated and actively exerted. We should be glad to see him adventuring an ode.

In every poetic mind—whether of the writer or the reader of poetry—there are certain subsidiary powers not to be overlooked. The poems in this volume, which, after the series of sonnets, are grouped under the title of “Thoughts and Fancies,” contain, amid some of a high mood, several varieties of the lighter forms of poetry. In the songs there is something that reminds us of the gracefulness of Moore’s *Melodies*,—his easy flow of versification, and the admirable art with which he gives wings to a sentiment. The piece entitled “A Medley” is an agreeable specimen of fancy disporting in its own nature,—revelling in its lawlessness,—darting away not quite out of sight, but far and wildly enough to occasion an amusing perplexity to readers who are sober-minded to an extreme,—straitened by a sort of intellectual over-righteousness. The following lines are of a more convenient length for quotation, and, though more regular in their conception, may illustrate the author’s manner in what may be designated poems of fancy :—

“WHAT I HAVE HEARD.

“I’ve heard the merry voice of spring,  
 When thousand birds their wild notes fling  
 Here and there and everywhere,  
 Stirring the young and gladsome air ;  
 I’ve heard the many-sounding seas,  
 And all their various harmonies,—  
 The tumbling tempest’s dismal roar,  
 On the waste and wreck-strew’d shore,—  
 The howl and the wail of the prison’d waves,  
 Clamouring in the ancient caves,  
 Like a stifled pain that asks for pity :  
 And I have heard the sea at peace,  
 When all its fearful noises cease,  
 Lost in one soft and multitudinous ditty,  
 Most like the murmur of a far-off city :  
 Nor less the blither notes I know,  
 To which the inland waters flow,—  
 The rush of rocky-bedded rivers,  
 That madly dash themselves to shivers ;  
 But anon, more prudent growing,  
 O’er countless pebbles smoothly flowing,  
 With a dull, continuous roar,  
 Hic they onward, evermore ;  
 To their everlasting tune,  
 When the sun is high at noon,

The little billows, quick and quicker,  
 Weave their mazes, thick and thicker,  
 And beneath, in dazzling glances,  
 Labyrinthine lightning dances,  
 Snaky network intertwining,  
 With thousand molten colours shining,—  
 Mosaic rich with living light,  
 With rainbow-jewels gaily dight :  
 Such pavement never, well I ween,  
     Was made, by monarch or magician,  
 For Arab or Egyptian queen ;  
     'T is gorgeous as a prophet's vision :  
 And I ken the brook, how sweet it tinkles,  
 As 'cross the moonlight green it twinkles,  
 Or heard, not seen, mid tangled wood,  
 When the soft stockdove lulls her brood  
 With her one note of all most dear,—  
 More soothing to the heart than ear :  
 And well I know the smother'd moan  
     Of that low breeze, so soft and brief,  
 It seems a very sigh, whose tone  
     Has much of love, but more of grief.  
 I know the sound of distant bells,  
 Their dying falls and lusty swells,—  
 That music which the wild gale seizes  
 And fashions howsoever it pleases.  
 And I love the shrill November blast,  
 That through the brown wood hurries fast  
 And strips its old limbs bare at last,  
 Then whirls the leaves in circling error,  
 As if instinct with life and terror ;  
 Now bursting out enough to deafen  
 The very thunder in the heaven,  
 Now sinking dolefully and dreary,  
 Weak as a child with sport awcary.  
 And after a long night of rain,  
 When the warm sun comes out again,  
 I 've heard the myriad-voicéd rills,—  
 The many tongues of many hills,—  
 All gushing forth in new-born glory,  
 Striving each to tell its story ;  
 Yet every little brook is known  
 By a voice that is its own,  
 Each exulting in the glee  
 Of its new prosperity."

The longest poem in the volume is the tale of "Leonard and Susan,"  
 —a narrative in which there is rather too much dallying with grief. It

is one of those pieces of unmitigated tragedy in which the heart craves relief. The picture of their young loves, with which the poem opens, abounds with very delicate touches of nature and feeling :—

“ They were a gentle pair, whose love began  
 They knew not when : they knew not of a time  
 When they loved not. In the mere sentient life  
 Of unremember'd infancy, whose speech,  
 Like secret love's, is only smiles and tears,  
 The baby Leonard clapp'd his little hands,  
 Leap'd in his nurse's arms, and crow'd aloud,  
 When Susan was in sight, and utter'd sounds  
 Most strange, and strangely sweet, that nothing meant  
 But merely joy, as in the greenwood tree  
 The merry merle awakes his thrilling song  
 Soon as the cool breath of the vernal dawn  
 Stirs the light leaflets on the motionless boughs.  
 Mute as the shadow of a passing bird  
 On glassy lake, the gentle Susan lay,  
 Hush'd in her meek delight. A dimpled smile  
 Curl'd round her tiny, rosy mouth, and seem'd  
 To sink, as light, into her soft full eyes,—  
 A quiet smile, that told of happiness  
 Her infant soul investing, as the bud  
 Enfolds the petals of the nascent rose.

“ Born in one week, and in one font baptized  
 On the same festal day, they grew together ;  
 And their first tottering steps were hand in hand,  
 While the two fathers, in half-earnest sport,  
 Betroth'd them to each other. Then 't was sweet  
 For mothers' ears to hear them lisp and try  
 At the same words, each imitating each ;  
 But Leonard was the babe of nimbler tongue,  
 And ' Sister Susan ' was the first plain phrase  
 His utterance master'd : by that dear kind name  
 He call'd the maid, supplying so a place  
 Which nature had left void. An only child  
 Of a proud mother and a high-born sire,  
 Full soon he learn'd to mount a palfrey small,  
 Of that dwarf race that prance unclaim'd and free  
 O'er the bleak pastures of the Shetland Isles.  
 And who may tell his glory or his pride  
 When Susan, by her mother's arms upheld,  
 Sat, glad though fearful, on the courser's rear,  
 While he, exulting in his dauntless skill,  
 Rein'd its short testy neck and froward mouth,  
 Taming its wilful movement to the pace

That palfrey suits of wandering lady fair ?  
 Bold were his looks ; his speech was bold and shrill ;  
 His smooth round cheeks glow'd with a ruddy brown ;  
 And dark the curls that cluster'd o'er his head,  
 Knotty and close. In every pliant limb  
 A noble boy's ambitious manliness  
 Elastic sprung. Yet child more loving, fond,  
 Ne'er sought the refuge of a parent's side.  
 But Susan was not one of many words,  
 Nor loud of laughter, and she moved as soft  
 As modest nymphs, in work of artist rare,  
 Seem moving ever. In her delicate eye  
 And damask cheek there dwelt a grace retired,  
 A prophecy of pensive womanhood.  
 And yet, in sooth, she was a happy child ;  
 And, though the single treasure of her house,  
 She neither miss'd a brother's love, nor lack'd  
 The blest emotions of a sister's soul.  
 She thought no sister loved a brother more  
 Than she her brother Leonard,—him who show'd  
 The strawberry lurking in the mossy shade,  
 The nest in leafy thicket dark embower'd,  
 The squirrel's airy bound. No bliss he knew,  
 No toy had he,—no pretty property,—  
 No dog,—no bird,—no fit of childish wrath,—  
 That was not hers. The wild and terrible tales  
 His garrulous old nurse o'er night had told,  
 He duly in the morning told to her,  
 With comments manifold ; and when seven years  
 Made him a student of learn'd Lilly's page,  
 With simple, earnest, kindly vanity,  
 He fill'd her wondering ear with all his lore  
 Of tense and conjugation, noun and verb ;  
 Searching the word-book for all pretty names—  
 All dainty, doting, dear diminutives—  
 Which the old Romans used to woo withal."

Imagination and fancy do not of themselves make up the poet's nature ; they are elements which are to be animated by quick and natural feeling. Has Hartley Coleridge the heart as well as the intellect of a poet ? The motto, from Chaucer, upon his title-page, conveys a sort of profession that the volume is a collection of love-poems ; and on many of its pages there are indications of a deep susceptibility to the attractions of female character, under the impulse of which he has given some very finished delineations of true womanly nature. From a number of more passionate pieces the following may be selected as an exquisite portrait of female dignity and sorrow :—

## "STANZAS.

- " She was a queen of noble nature's crowning ;  
 A smile of hers was like an act of grace ;  
 She had no winsome looks, no pretty frowning,  
 Like daily beauties of the vulgar race :  
 But, if she smiled, a light was on her face,  
 A clear, cool kindliness, a lunar beam  
 Of peaceful radiance, silvering o'er the stream  
 Of human thought with unabiding glory ;  
 Not quite a waking truth, not quite a dream :—  
 A visitation, bright and transitory.
- " But she is changed,—hath felt the touch of sorrow ;  
 No love hath she, no understanding friend ;  
 Oh, grief ! when Heaven is forced of earth to borrow  
 What the poor niggard earth has not to lend ;  
 But when the stalk is snapt the rose must bend.  
 The tallest flower that skyward rears its head,  
 Grows from the common ground, and there must shed  
 Its delicate petals. Cruel fate, too surely,  
 That they should find so base a bridal bed  
 Who lived in virgin pride so sweet and purely !
- " She had a brother, and a tender father,  
 And she was loved, but not as others are  
 From whom we ask a return of love,—but rather  
 As one might love a dream ; a phantom fair  
 Of something exquisitely strange and rare,  
 Which all were glad to look on, men and maids,  
 Yet no one claim'd ; as oft in dewy glades  
 The peering primrose, like a sudden gladness,  
 Gleams on the soul, yet unregarded fades :  
 The joy is ours, but all its own the sadness.
- " 'T is vain to say her worst of grief is only  
 The common lot, which all the world have known ;  
 To her 't is more, because her heart is lonely,  
 And yet she hath no strength to stand alone.  
 Once she had playmates, fancies of her own,  
 And she did love them. They are pass'd away,  
 As fairies vanish at the break of day ;  
 And, like a spectre of an age departed,  
 Or unsphered angel woefully astray,  
 She glides along,—the solitary-hearted."

We have rarely met with anything more felicitous than that closing line ; the being described with such self-restraining power—never too much revealed from the cloud of mystery that envelopes it—passes away an object of admiration more than of love,—too sacred for common



human sympathy. The same pure feeling towards the sex pervades the volume, and finds expression in some elegiac pieces of a very touching character. There is evidence in the volume of a susceptibility to other emotions than the passion of love, and we are glad of it, for we have no great partiality for the poet amatory exclusively, whom we are tempted to fancy a sort of "Master Slender,"—"a softly-sprighted man, with a little yellow beard," who has but one thought, "Sweet Anne Page!" and no other recollections than "stewed prunes" and the bear-garden. Love-poets find their profit in the easy access they gain to the soft hearts that abound all the world over. But the true poet must deal with other feelings beside the one master-passion,—kindly affections, and calm and placid impulses. As far as a writer's character may be conjectured from his writings, Hartley Coleridge must be a gentle and right-hearted being. Omitting those instances in which he speaks dramatically, there is an air of sincerity in his expressions of feeling which mightily wins his reader's goodwill. We must except his expressions of mirth, which have not a real or healthy tone; and, although there are in the volume words which, as Jeremy Taylor says, are "as light as the skirt of a summer-garment," yet they seem to be rather the relief of a heavy heart than the ventings of a light one. Passing them by, the beauty of sincerity is not the least of the beauties of the following lines:—

" SENSE, IF YOU CAN FIND IT.

" Like one pale, flitting, lonely gleam  
Of sunshine on a winter's day,  
There came a thought upon my dream,  
I know not whence, but fondly deem  
It came from far away.

" Those sweet, sweet snatches of delight  
That visit our bedarken'd clay  
Like passage-birds, with hasty flight :—  
It cannot be they perish quite,  
Although they pass away.

" They come and go, and come again ;  
They 're ours, whatever time they stay :  
Think not, my heart, they come in vain,  
If one brief while they soothe thy pain  
Before they pass away.

" But whither go they? No one knows  
Their home ; but yet they seem to say  
That far beyond this gulf of woes  
There is a region of repose  
For them that pass away ! "

We feel as if we should be missing a rare opportunity for appropriate quotation, considering the approaching season, if we passed by the stanzas on "New Year's Day." We are pretty confident that the year will come to its close without producing anything conceived in better feeling, and that many a New Year's sermon will be preached to duller ears. At all events, the stanzas will be less likely than the sermons to be applied by those to whom they are addressed, away from themselves, to their neighbours. We have ventured to call attention, by means of italics, to some of the lines which show the exuberance of the poet's fancy :—

" NEW YEAR'S DAY.

" While the bald trees stretch forth their long lank arms,  
And starving birds peck nigh the reeky farms ;  
While houseless cattle paw the yellow field,  
Or, coughing, shiver in the pervious bield,  
And naught more gladsome in the hedge is seen  
Than the dark holly's grimly-glistening green ;  
At such a time the ancient year goes by  
To join its parent in eternity ;  
At such a time the merry year is born,  
Like the bright berry from the naked thorn.

" The bell rings out ; the hoary steeples rocks ;  
Hark ! the long story of a score of clocks ;  
For once a year the village clocks agree,—  
E'en elocks agree to sound the hour of glee ;  
And every cottage has a light awake,  
Unusual stars long flicker o'er the lake ;  
The moon on high, if any moon be there,  
May peep, or wink ; no mortal now will eare :  
For 't is the season when the nights are long.  
There's time, ere morn, for each to sing his song.

" The year departs. A blessing on its head !  
We mourn not for it, for it is not dead.  
Dead ? What is that ? A word to joy unknown,  
Which love abhors, and faith will never own.  
A word whose meaning sense could never find,  
That has no truth in matter, nor in mind.  
*The passing breezes gone as soon as felt,*  
*The flakes of snow that in the soft air melt,*  
*The wave that whitening curls its frothy crest*  
*And falls to sleep upon its mother's breast,*  
*The smile that sinks into a maiden's eye,—*  
They come, they go, they change ; they do not die.  
So the old year—that fond and formal name—  
Is with us yet, another and the same.

“ And are the thoughts that evermore are fleeing,  
 The moments that make up our being’s being,  
 The silent workings of unconscious love,  
 Or the dull hate which clings, and will not move.  
 In the dark caverns of the gloomy heart,  
 The fancies wild and horrible, which start  
 Like loathsome reptiles from their cranking holes,  
 From foul, neglected corners of our souls :—  
 Are these less vital than the waves or wind,  
 Or snow that melts and leaves no trace behind ?  
 Oh ! let them perish all, or pass away,  
 And let our spirits feel a New Year’s day.

“ A New Year’s day ! ’t is but a term of art,—  
 An arbitrary line upon the chart  
 Of time’s unbounded sea,—fond Fancy’s creature,  
 To reason alien, and unknown to nature.  
 Nay : ’t is a joyful day,—a day of hope !  
 Bound, merry dancer, like an antelope ;  
 And as that lovely creature, far from man,  
 Gleams through the spicy groves of Hindostan,  
 Flash through the labyrinth of the mazy dance  
 With foot as nimble, and as keen a glance.

“ And we, whom many New Year’s days have told  
 The sober truth that we are growing old,  
 For this one night—ay, and for many more—  
 Will be as jocund as we were of yore.  
 Kind hearts can make December blithe as May,  
 And in each morrow find a New Year’s day.”

Hartley Coleridge is an egotist ; and gracefully does his egotism sit upon him. It is one of the poet’s privileges. There are expressions throughout the volume calculated to excite commiseration and somewhat of curiosity in some breasts,—murmurings of self-reproach,—repinings after misspent time and neglected talent, together with intimations of domestic griefs. We know not what it may all mean, but certain are we that there is an air of sad reality about it : it is no fantastic woe,—none of the old *fashion* of melancholy that may be traced from the days of Ben Jonson’s “Master Stephen” down to the times of Lord Byron. It is not possible to suspect Hartley Coleridge of playing any such small game,—of following the worn-out device of enacting “*Il Penseroso*” for effect. His allusions to his poverty do him honour, and we cannot believe that one who has learned to depict nature with the delicacy and fidelity which mark this volume has been idle, or unprofitably employed. At all events, he has before him the time and the power of self-recovery. Throwing aside all distrust of the poetic power of the English tongue,

let him not waver or be drawn down by any despondency. Let him call to mind "the labour and intense study" which Milton looked upon as his portion in life, when he conceived the thought of "a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases." Let him look to his favourite Wordsworth, and see what that career is which befits him who meditates the great achievements in verse, and we have no fear but that at some future day we shall behold him on higher ground than the beautiful effusions in the present volume. It has been our object to make our readers acquainted with a name that is well worth the knowing, and we have thus, we flatter ourselves, been helping Mr. Hartley Coleridge to gain some of his distant fame,—a commodity that loses none of its value because it comes from far away. We take our leave of him, for the present, by quoting a poem of exquisite finish and beauty, which we have reserved for a final impression:—

"THE SABBATH DAY'S CHILD.

TO ELIZABETH, INFANT DAUGHTER OF THE REV. SIR RICHARD  
FLEMING, BART.

"Pure precious drop of dear mortality,—  
Untainted fount of life's meandering stream,  
Whose innocence is like the dewy beam  
Of morn, a visible reality,  
Holy and quiet as a hermit's dream,—  
Unconscious witness to the promised birth  
Of perfect good, that may not grow on earth  
Nor be computed by the worldly worth  
And stated limits of morality,—  
Fair type and pledge of full redemption given,  
Through Him that saith, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

"Sweet infant, whom thy brooding parents love  
For what thou art, and what they hope to see thee,  
Unhallow'd spirits and earth-born phantoms flee thee;  
Thy soft simplicity—a hovering dove,  
That still keeps watch, from blight and bane to free thee;  
With its weak wings, in peaceful care outspread,  
Fanning invisibly thy pillow'd head—  
Strikes evil powers with reverential dread  
Beyond the sulphurous bolts of fabled Jove,  
Or whatsoe'er of amulet or charm  
Fond Ignorance devised to save poor souls from harm.

" To see thee sleeping on thy mother's breast,  
 It were indeed a lovely sight to see ;  
 Who would believe that restless sin can be  
 In the same world that holds such sinless rest ?  
 Happy art thou, sweet babe, and happy she  
 Whose voice alone can still thy baby-cries,  
 Now still itself ; yet pensive smiles, and sighs,  
 And the mute meanings of a mother's eyes,  
 Declare her thinking, deep felicity,—  
 A bliss, my babe, how much unlike to thine,  
 Mingled with earthly fears, yet cheer'd with hope divine !

" Thou breathing image of the life of nature !  
 Say, rather, image of a happy death ;  
 For the vicissitudes of vital breath,  
 Of all infirmity the slave and creature,  
 That by the act of being perisheth,  
 Are far unlike that slumber's perfect peace,  
 Which seems too absolute and pure to cease,  
 Or suffer diminution or increase,  
 Or change of hue, proportion, shape, or feature ;  
 A calm, it seems, that is not, shall not be  
 Save in the silent depths of calm eternity.

" A star reflected in a dimpling rill  
 That moves so slow it hardly moves at all,—  
 The shadow of a white-robed waterfall,  
 Seen in the lake beneath when all is still,—  
 A wandering cloud that, with its fleecy pall,  
 Whitens the lustre of an autumn moon,—  
 A sudden breeze that cools the cheek of noon,  
 Not mark'd till miss'd, so soft it fades, and soon,—  
 Whatever else the fond inventive skill  
 Of Fancy may suggest,—cannot supply  
 Fit semblance of the sleeping life of infancy.

" Calm art thou as the blessed Sabbath eve,  
 The blessed Sabbath eve when thou wast born ;  
 Yet sprightly as a summer Sabbath morn,  
 When, surely, 't were a thing unmeet to grieve ;  
 When ribbons gay the village-maids adorn,  
 And Sabbath music on the swelling gales  
 Floats to the farthest nooks of winding vales  
 And summons all the beauty of the dales.  
 Fit music this a stranger to receive ;  
 And, lovely child, it rung to welcome thee,  
 Announcing thy approach with gladsome minstrelsy.

" So be thy life,—a gentle Sabbath, pure  
 From worthless strivings of the work-day earth !



May time make good the omen of thy birth,  
Nor worldly care thy growing thoughts immure,  
Nor hard-eyed thrift usurp the throne of mirth  
On thy smooth brow. And, though fast-coming years  
Must bring their fated dower of maiden fears,  
Of timid blushes, sighs, and fertile tears,—  
Soft sorrow's sweetest offspring, and her cure,—  
May every day of thine be good and holy,  
And thy worst woe a pensive Sabbath melancholy ! ”

THE END.







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